

Rev. Janet R. Doyle

Elmer Presbyterian Church

2nd Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 16, 2025

Scripture: John 8: 2-11

Sermon: Don't Throw Stones: Forgiver

While waiting at the airport terminal for her plane to begin boarding, a woman sat reading a newspaper. Earlier, she had purchased a package of cookies in the airport snack shop to eat after she got on the plane. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed that the man sitting next to her was eating a cookie. She looked down and noticed that her package of cookies had been opened and the man was eating them.

The woman couldn't believe that the man would have the nerve to eat her cookies. So that she wouldn't lose all of her cookies to the man, she slowly reached over, took a cookie, and ate one herself. To her amazement, the man continued to eat more cookies. Getting more and more irritated, the woman removed all but one cookie from the package and ate them.

At that point, the man reached down and took the last cookie. Before eating it, though, he broke it in half and left half of the cookie for the woman. This made the woman so angry; she grabbed the empty package with the half cookie and crammed it in her purse.

Then, to her shock, she noticed that there in her purse was her unopened package of cookies.

Sometimes we find it so easy to judge others or cast the blame or throw the first stone at somebody else, when the cold hard truth is that God wants us to look at our own lives first and know that we are all sinners and need to be forgiven.

One of the most powerful examples of the mercy and compassion of Jesus comes in our scripture lesson this morning of the adulterous woman that not only committed adultery but was caught in the very act!

Jesus did not distance Himself from the world, or from those that are trapped in sin. Instead, He showed them compassion, talked to them, and encouraged them to sin no more. The world would do well to follow the

example of Jesus and look for opportunities to show compassion and not judgment.

The woman that had been caught in the act of adultery had no shortage of people judging her and ready to throw stones at her. They were ready to stone her to death when Jesus stepped in and said: “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7)

Nobody threw a stone because nobody was without sin.

Jesus asked the woman: “Where are they? Did no one condemn you?” (John 8:10) She said: “No one, Lord.”(John 8:11)

Jesus already knew what her answer would be. He was positioning himself to be able to show her mercy in a way that she would never forget. Jesus said to the woman:

“I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.” (John 8:11)

Can you imagine this sequence of events from the point of view of the woman?

The Bible says that the woman was not only caught in adultery but she was also caught in the act itself. Adultery under the Old Law was a sin punishable by death by stoning for both people caught in adultery.

As she prepares herself for a certain painful death, somebody steps in to help her. She refers to Jesus as, “Lord,” and then He tells her that she is not condemned!

The compassion and forgiveness that Jesus demonstrated were life-changing for this woman!

Not only was she saved from a violent and shameful death, but she was also told that there is still time to get her soul right with God. This must have given her hope at a time when she needed it the most. Jesus will do the same thing for us if we let him. The scribes and Pharisees were calling for blood!

Jesus showed her mercy and compassion. Then he encouraged her to sin no more.

All of us know how good it feels to be forgiven when we have done something wrong. The bigger the sin, the more relief we feel when that sin is forgiven.

The story of the adulterous woman shows us the incredible forgiveness and compassion that Jesus has. As His disciples, we are to learn from His

example and show the people in our lives the type of forgiveness and compassion that we hope Jesus will show us.

There is no place for judgment in the life of a Christian. That is not our role. Our role is to show others the love and compassion of Jesus in all that we say and do.

During His Sermon on Mount, Jesus said:

“If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”(Matthew 6:15) Also in Matthew 7: 3-5 Jesus talks about the “log in your eye” which states, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” Before criticizing or judging others we should first examine our own life.

When others are judgmental, we are to be compassionate.

When the world is hateful, we are to show our love and mercy.

Some speculate perhaps the woman was set up. Maybe the man was even among them in the accusing party. The text doesn’t tell us, so we can’t be sure. But if these scribes and Pharisees were really concerned about upholding the law, they should have brought the man too since, by their own accusation, they surely had seen him and by Jewish law both are to come before the leaders. But the woman was enough for their purposes. They were using her to trap Jesus. They were taking her shame for their gain. They were more threatened by Jesus than they were by any lawbreakers. There was no formal trial. There was only an accusation and then a question, “What do you say, Jesus?”

If Jesus didn’t uphold the law, then all he said about fulfilling the law was a lie. But if he did uphold the law and commanded stoning, how would that go with his insistence on grace and mercy and the compassion he showed to sinners throughout his ministry?

Do you see what’s on the line? It comes down to this: is Jesus just, or is he just compassionate? Jesus combines compassion and justice so perfectly that the world has never seen anything like it.

How did Jesus respond? Verse 6. “Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.” What did he write? Don’t you want to know? Well, I do too, but there is no way to know. No one knows what he wrote, and anyone who says they know what he wrote is just making it up.

Notice what Jesus didn’t say. He didn’t say, “Don’t throw any stones.” What did he say? He said, “Go ahead, but make sure the one who throws it is

without sin.” He trapped the trappers. He confronted the accusers. He turned the tables on them. He said, “You want to apply the law? Then let’s apply it.” It’s a brilliant move. He didn’t deny the law, he applied the law. And no one could stand before it. No one there was without sin except for him. No one was qualified to throw the first stone but him. And he didn’t do it.

Verse 9 says, “When they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones.” Why the older ones first? Maybe because as you age, you start to realize just how far from perfect you really are. You can trick yourself into thinking you’re not that bad when you’re young.

Then he went back to writing on the ground. Again, we don’t know what he wrote. It doesn’t matter.

Then Jesus stood, looked at the woman, and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

Commentator Colin Kruse points out that this is the first time in the whole episode that anyone addressed the woman. They dragged her in, accused her of adultery, and demanded her death, but until then, no one spoke anything to her.

Jesus did not start with her sin. He started with her accusers. Isn’t that interesting? When she answered that none of them condemned her, Jesus said something amazing in response. “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

Here’s where we get straight to the very heart of Christianity. Christianity says that we are guilty, but we aren’t condemned. How can that be? If we are guilty, we must be condemned. Justice demands it. If we are truly guilty, there is no way around it. So, how can Jesus say this? How can we be guilty but not condemned?

Perhaps the most amazing verse in the Bible, Romans 8:1, says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” Here’s how we can be guilty but not condemned. Only if we’re in Christ. It can only be true if Jesus takes our guilt for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Only if Jesus takes our guilt and our sin and pays the price for us can we not be condemned. It’s only true if Jesus is condemned for us. The guilt and sin don’t just disappear. The penalty must be paid. Someone must pay it.

Our Savior, he knows that Instead of throwing the first stone, he will let stones be thrown at him. Instead of her being crushed beneath the weight of their blows, he will suffocate upon the cross under God's wrath for her sin.

Jesus didn't condemn her then because he would be condemned for her later. That's why Paul says in Romans 3:26 that God is both just and the justifier. He is just, and no sin will go unpunished, but for his people, he is also the justifier, the one who sets things right on the cross. That's the only way this works. He can only forgive because he will pay the penalty himself. That's the heart of Christianity. Jesus is our Forgiver so we will live Forgiven.