



April 7, 2019 John 8: 1-11 & Is. 43: 16-21

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

This story, only found in John, finds Jesus once again under the magnifying glass of those wishing to render him impotent. They use a religious motive to give them permission to use deadly force. Their envious hearts found a rejected heart to reassure their own virtue. Once again, Jesus reaches into himself to find a both/and response to their either or question. This is only possible because he knows that the Father loves even those with stones in their hands. His response creates a space for the Spirit to work in even the hardest of hearts. The Pharisees weren't around to hear Jesus say; "nor do I condemn you". How has God's love for you helped you to see the 'other' the way Jesus saw? Have any of your Lenten practices helped you to do this?

[John 8: 1-11](#)

1. Jesus went out to the **Mount of Olives**. 2. At daybreak he reappeared in the temple area; and when the people started coming to him, he **sat down** and began to teach them. 3. The **scribes** and the **Pharisees** led a

woman forward who had been **caught in adultery**. They made her stand there in **front** of everyone. 4. "**Teacher**," they said to him, "this **woman** has been caught in the act of **adultery**. 5. In the **law**, **Moses** ordered such women to be **stoned**. What do you have to say about the case?" 6. (They were **posing this question to trap** him, so that they could have something to **accuse** him of.) Jesus simply **bent down** and started **tracing** on the **ground** with his **finger**. 7. When they **persisted** in their **questioning**, he **straightened up** and said to them, "Let the **man** among you who has no sin be the first to cast a **stone** at her." 8. A second time he **bent down** and wrote on the **ground**. 9. Then the **audience drifted** away one by one, beginning with the **elders**. This left him alone with the **woman**, who continued to **stand** there before him. 10. Jesus finally **straightened up** again and said to her, "**Woman**, where did they all **disappear** to? Has no one **condemned** you?" 11. "No sir," she answered. Jesus said, "Nor do I **condemn** you. You may go. But from now on, avoid this sin."

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus found a way for everyone to learn from the encounter of the woman caught in adultery by remembering that God loved everyone there that day. How does remembering that God loves even your enemy, help you to decide what to do when challenged?

PRAYER: Counselor Jesus, you use this situation to help everyone see a deeper reality. You know that the Father wants freely given love, not just fearful obedience. Those who wanted to be right more than acknowledging their relationship with all who miss the mark and sin, have a chance to look within honestly and find the best in themselves. The poor woman encounters a man who values her dignity and gives her the freedom to do the same. Help me as I take all the chances you give me to look within and find the best in me. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

Mount of Olives: The Mount of Olives seems to be a favorite place for Jesus. Mt. 21:1; 24:3; 26:30; Mk. 11:1; 13:8; 14:26; 19:29,37; Lk. 21:27; 22:39; Jn. 8:1. It served as a meeting place, a place for prayer, and ultimately a place to suffer before his arrest.

Do I have a place in your life that seems to be central to my faith life, like the Mount of Olives was for Jesus? If so, where is it? If not, where might it be?

Sat down: A teacher sat to teach in Jesus' day. This is different from the usual standing posture of our day.

How could these two different postures affect the way the students might receive the information? Which one lends to learning best in my estimation?

Scribes/Pharisees: The gospels often use these two designations of people to indicate the upholders of the law, and the judges of righteousness. They often seem to be the ones most interested in challenging Jesus.

Who are the equivalent guardians of righteousness today? Would they challenge Jesus if he were among us now saying and doing what he did?

Woman: The woman in Jesus' day was the only person capable of committing adultery. She was considered the property of her husband, and therefore anyone transgressing on his property was subject to punishment.

How do I think this woman felt as she was dragged in front of everyone that day? What do I suppose happened to the man who was her partner?

Caught: To be caught is to be entrapped somehow.

Do I suppose that the scribes and Pharisees just happened on this couple and then used her for their own motives? Could there be any other possibilities for this scenario?

Adultery: To adult can mean to water down, to dilute, or to contaminate. The husband's right to control his wife and her fertility (and therefore his estate) was paramount in a day when they did not have DNA testing to prove paternity.

Could this explain the extreme penalty attached to this act?

Front: To be put up front is to leave no room for hiding anything. This woman was put up front in order to leave Jesus no room for any of his "tricky" answers.

Have I ever been used by someone like this woman was used here? If so, how did it feel?

Teacher: A teacher is someone recognized as having information needed by someone else. When Jesus was called teacher by the scribes and Pharisees, it was often in order to get him to self-incriminate.

Jesus was also being put up front by the questions of these people. Do I think that this enabled him to feel with the woman in a special way?

Law: A law is something a group of people agree to uphold in order to make humane life possible. The Ten Commandments served this purpose for the people since the time of Moses.

Do I feel the law against adultery served this purpose? For whom?

Moses: Moses was the one to whom God gave the law on the mountain for all the people. This enabled him to bring together people from everywhere into community.

How were the people using the law that day? How did Jesus' response enable them to see deeper into the law and deeper into themselves?

Stoned: Stoning was the method of execution for adultery. This involved a communal effort, with no one person identified as the killer, and put to death the offender of the communally agreed upon behavior. When Jesus challenged each person to look into themselves before picking up a rock, he once again revealed the face of God and God's mercy.

How do I feel when someone gives me a chance to reach down into my better nature instead of my worst nature? What do I find there that makes it unlikely to pick up a stone?

Posing: Someone posing is usually putting up a false position under the guise of a truth.

Am I able to sense when this is happening? What does this make me do?

Questioning: A question is a form of a quest.

What quest were the scribes and Pharisees on that day? What quest did Jesus lead them to?

Trap: A trap is the method used to catch something or someone. The self-righteous thought they were trapping the woman and Jesus with their questions.

Jesus turned the trap around and used it to confront the challengers. What helped him come to this solution?

Accuse: To accuse is to claim something about another.

What were the scribes and Pharisees accusing Jesus and the woman of that day? What did they hope to gain?

Bent down: Jesus bent down low enough to scribble on the ground with his finger. This prevented him from facing down any of his accusers.

Why do I think he did that?

Tracing: A tracing could be an outlining of some previous pattern.
What I you suppose Jesus was tracing on the ground that day?

Ground: Jesus was grounded in God.
Do I see any significance in the fact that he used the ground to do his tracing?

Finger: By using his finger Jesus could not face or even see those people who brought the charges. It seems to imply that he expected that they would respond honestly if given the chance.
Was Jesus was foolish to do this? If I had been there that day, what effect would his behavior have on my decision to pick up a stone?

Persisted: The people kept at Jesus with their questions. It was then that Jesus challenged them in return.
If I had been there, would I have persisted with the questions? If so, why? If not, why?

Straightened: Now Jesus stands up and faces the people and the questioners head on. He turns the situation around in order to give the accusers a chance to learn from the unfortunate dilemma they had created.
How does the law of God give me this same chance to learn?

Man: The man in Jesus' time was unquestionably in charge of most things. He would have been the one to judge, sentence, and carry out the punishment for this crime.



How does being in charges set the scene for inhumane behavior? What does the man Jesus do to make a more humane relationship between men and women of then and now?

Audience: An audience is a group of people listening/watching something.
If I were in the audience, what would you have made of this situation?

Drifted: To drift is to be carried along by air, water, or events. The people drifted away as Jesus once again bent down to let them decide upon what to do with his challenge.
What were the people carried by as they left the scene of the challenge?

(Picture: Max Beckmann: 1917)

The horrors of the First World War were too much for Beckmann: He broke down and was invalidated out of the army. During these traumatic months, as he struggled back to mental health (the war was far from over when he painted this scene from the Gospel of *John*), images of human cruelty and suffering haunted him. He has *Jesus* and the woman hemmed in by violence and hatred, sheer extrapolations into the gospel story, but it is noticeable that only the man removed from them, on the far side of the fence (the noncombatant who urges bloodshed) has his eyes open. Jesus and the woman have their eyes closed, and so does their most vicious tormentor, the sneering butcher whose hands form a square with those of the praying woman and the quiet, forgiving Lord. The ravaged face of this Lord Jesus is that of Beckmann himself, passionately seeking the role of reconciliation and healing.

Elders: The elders, the ones who should have known better than to even challenge Jesus, were the first to drift away.
Do I think being an elder was significant in their being the one to leave first? Why?

Stand: Now Jesus and the woman are standing face to face alone. To stand is to be recognized as a peer.
How I you think the woman felt as Jesus looked at her and freed her from judgment? What does this tell me about the God of Jesus?

Disappear: The accusers disappeared, and the truth about God now appears.
How does mercy make God appear? Has mercy ever revealed God to me? How do I know that this is a true revelation of God?

Condemn: To condemn is to judge someone or something as being bad. Jesus did not condemn the woman. He just asked her to learn from this situation and not repeat it.

How did this lack of condemnation enable the woman to learn from this situation? Has condemnation ever helped me learn something? Has mercy ever helped me learn something?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 8:1f // Lk. 2:37f; Lk. 8:5 // Lev. 20:10; Dt. 22:22ff; Lk. 8:8 // Mt. 7:1-5; Lk. 8:10 // Ezek. 33:11; Lk. 8:11 // Jn. 5:14;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 43: 16-21; [Ps. 126: 1-6](#); Phil. 3:8-14; Jn. 8: 1-11;

Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 43: 16-21; [Ps. 126](#); Phil. 3: 4-14; Jn. 12:1-8;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Finally, there is still another kind of intelligence, moral intelligence. What is this? Sometimes we call it depth or wisdom or character. Whatever its name, moral intelligence is a sensitivity to the deeper contours within life. It is a certain grasp of those things which hold life together at its root and which must be respected so that life doesn't go sour, unravel, disintegrate, and turn against us. Moral intelligence intuits the imperatives innate within the DNA of life itself. It grasps the things we have to do, and not just the things we like to do. It lays bare the hard-wiring inside the mystery of life and love. Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Moral Intelligence](#)

It is worthwhile reading Maximus, *Lib. Ascet.* 32f (PG 90, 037f.): ‘Tell me, who of us have no part in the aforementioned evils? Are we not all gluttonous? Are we not all lovers of pleasure? Are we not all mad for, and lovers of, material things? Are we not all savages? Are we not all nurturers of wrath? Are we not all bearers of malice? Are we not all traitors to every virtue? Are we not all revilers? Are we not all fond of scoffing? Do we not all hate our brothers? Are we not full of evil?’

Eng. trans. By P. Sherwood, St. Masimus: The ascetic Life, P. 122) Zizioulas, John D. Communion and Otherness. NY. T & T Clark. 2006. Pg. 85.

Our openness to truth not only demonstrates that we are intellectually free, but explains what that freedom is for and why it is important. Truth cannot enter a mind that is not first open to it; it cannot move a mind whose movements are already dictated by “blind natural causality.” The same is true of moral freedom. The soul cannot be open to the morally good if its movements are determined by the blind natural causality of physics, chemistry, and biology. It is our freedom that makes possible our openness to truth, beauty, goodness. Christians believe that it is primarily in possession of this freedom that we are made in God’s image and likeness. Pg. 20. Barr, Stephen M. More than Machines; Physics & Free Will. Commonweal. 11/20/09

Our weakness is a truth we want to avoid. Fr. Jonah Wharff

The demand issuing from personally experienced moments of truth is the new world we have inherited. The eye of the needle. If threaded, it will sew. Pg.81. Fuller, Ross: The Eye of the Needle. Parabola 12/07

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried. G. K. Chesterton

Truth revealed must enter into the fires of testing; this is the only way that truth can be confirmed in the soul -Anonymous

In the gospels Jesus never condemns anyone the Pharisees condemn. He is not concerned with sins of commission. These can always be redeemed. There are many examples: the woman who came to Jesus at the Pharisee's house and anointed his feet with ointment, the adulteress, whom the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to judge, and the prodigal son. The prodigal son lived boldly, and though he made mistakes along the way, he embraced life and came to a deeper relationship with his father. He is compared to his brother, for whom nothing changes and who envies the welcome the prodigal receives. Rather than condemn boldness, Jesus sees it as a sign of spiritual health. Those who paralyze the human spirit and condemn its manifestations commit the far greater sin. They deny their own energies and let them fester to do much damage in the long run. Galipeau, Steven A... [Transforming Body and Soul](#) . NY. Paulist Press, 1990. Page 90.

The law prescribed capital punishment in this situation. The righteous group of men come to execute the law. Each cloaks himself in the virtuous purpose of the larger group. Jesus doesn't question the law, but instead introduces a proviso that has the effect of reminding them of their identity as individual persons, apart from the protective shield of collective virtue. He strips them of their cover, and they recognize that no individual among them can claim sufficient virtue to dare to carry out the sentencing. They begin to identify with the accused.

The notion of "collective virtue as cover" deserves some reflection. How easily the claim that God is on my side can be used to justify actions I would not otherwise dare.Aren't religious motivations the only ones powerful enough to justify our contemplation of using ultimate force? Beck, Fr. Robert.. [Sunday's Word .The Witness](#) , March 13, 1983. Page 5.

But if you do not receive him who repents, because you are without mercy, you shall sin against the Lord God. For you do not obey our Savior and our God, to do as even he did with her who had sinned, whom the elders placed before Him, leaving the judgment in His hands, and departed. But He, the searcher of hearts, asked her and said to her, “Have the elders condemned you, my daughter?” She said to him, “Nay, Lord.” And he said unto her, “Go, neither do I condemn you.”

(*Didascalia Apostolorum* 8.2.4) Written by a early second century bishop of Hierapolis named Papias.

We find, therefore, in certain gospels: *A woman*, it says, was condemned by the Jews for a sin and was being sent to be stoned in the place where that was customary to happen. The savior, it says, when he saw her and observed that they were ready to stone her, said to those who were about to cast stones, “he who has not sinned, let him take a stone and cast it. If anyone is conscious in himself not to have sinned, let him take up a stone and smite her.” And no one dared. Since they knew in themselves and perceived that they themselves were guilty in some things, they did not dare to strike her. (*EcclII* 223.6b—13a)” Didymus the Blind: 4th Century in a commentary of *Ecclus. 7:21-22*. Found in a 1941 excavation, written in Greek. Collins, Raymond F. [Sexual Ethics and the New Testament](#). NY. Crossroads. 2000. Pages 8-9.

Conscience is a little three-cornered thing in the heart that stands still when we are good, but when we are bad it turns around a lot. If we keep on going wrong, soon the corners wear off and it does not hurt any more.

(Arazona Indian saying) Weighing the Heart: *Parabola*, Fall 1997. Page 42.

The awakening of a new consciousness so called, as far as the inward way of seeing into the nature of things is concerned is no other than consciousness becoming acquainted with itself. Not that a new consciousness rises out of the unconscious but consciousness itself turns inwardly into itself. This is the home-coming. This is the seeing of one’s own “primal face” which one has even before one’s birth. This is God’s pronouncing his name to Moses. This is the birth of Christ in each of our souls. This is Christ rising from death. “The Unconscious,” which has been lying quietly in consciousness itself, now raises its head and announces its presence through consciousness. (Daietz T. Suzuki)



(Do not look at the faults of others, or what others have done or not done; observe what you yourself have done and have not done. *Dhammapada* 4.7)

Marcus borg & Riegert, Ray. *East Meets West: The Uncanny Parallels in the Lives of Buddha and Jesus*. Bible Review. October 1999. Pages 18ff.

Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery.

Oil on panel. Jan Sanders van Hemessen. Flemish, mid-16th century. Buechner, Frederick. *The Faces of Jesus*. NY. Harper and Row. 1989. Page 119

Jesus’ words not only save a woman but, defuse a potential explosion. Nobody dies that day. Instead, everyone goes home considerably more attuned to humility and truth. Nonviolent efforts for justice and peace work that way. Like Jesus, they do not turn the crowd against anyone, innocent or guilty. Rather they gently touch that part of the conscience that is still soft and inviolate, where truth still

rings true and where peace is still a tender longing. Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing*. NY. Doubleday. 1999. Pages 183-4.

When Christ said: “Forgive them for they know not what they do,” He was speaking of an ignorance that excuses sin. Most of the time when we sin – we do know what we are doing, but we don’t know how much God loves us – hence we are still innocent through ignorance. Karl Rahner, *Prayers for a Lifetime* 181

He who thinks that loving one’s enemies is impractical doesn’t take into account the practical consequences of hating one’s enemies. Erich Fried

Jn. 8.11: The adulterous woman. This episode is an interpolation and therefore not part of the original Gospel. It appears in Mss of other Gospels, particularly after Lk 21.38, where it fits the narrative much better. Here the conclusion of the incident, in v. 11, does not lead into the following v. 12; in addition, scribes and Pharisees is not a phrase in John’s Gospel (John uses the term “Pharisees,” but not “scribes”), but is frequent in Luke. 1: Mount of Olives, a ridge overlooking the Jerusalem Temple. 3: The sole reference to the scribes in John’s Gospel; in the Synoptics they are closely associated with the chief priests (e.g., Mt 2.4; Mk 8.31; Lk 20.19) and the Pharisees (Mt 23.2; Mk 2.16; Lk 6.7). 5: Lev 20.10; Deut 22.23–24. Roman law did not permit execution for adultery. Jesus’ opponents may have been trying to test his faithfulness to the law. 6: What Jesus wrote in the sand is not known, though it may be an allusion to Jer 17.13, which declares that those who depart from God shall be written in the earth (“underworld” in NRSV). Perhaps it is simply the fact that he is writing—thereby evoking the Written Torah?—that is important. Pgs. 174-5.

[The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

Begging on page 223 –Narrative Conflict in the Gospels- and ending on page 227 of Robert Beck’s book [Jesus and His Enemies](#) we find: “John shows us resistance as love. The inner spirit of nonviolent struggle is foregrounded. As Joan Bondurant has insisted, proper nonviolent opposition is bringing truth to a situation in a spirit of love. Bondurant, in exploring the nonviolent practice of Gandhi, emphasizes the place of openness to the opponent, avoiding “symbolic violence,” in conflict refuses to demonize the opponent’s change, even conversion. Love is open to the truth of the other; love offers one’s own truth as an option for the other to consider and adopt. It hopes for conversion.

When God decided to create the world, God foresaw all the sin that human beings would commit. The only way God could continue was to decide to forgive the world before creating it. Strange as it may seem, the commitment to forgive comes before the creation. Old Jewish story.

The person who loves God cannot help loving every man as himself, even though he is grieved by the passions of those who are not yet purified. But when they amend their lives, his delight is indescribable and knows no bounds. St. Maximor the Confessor

Christ came as the *word* to do for us what our mother tongue does, namely, to shape us in such a way that we can move beyond the fear, darkness, and chaos that prevent us from entering the world of love, thought, and self-expression.

Rolheiser, Ronald. *Against an Infinite Horizon*. NY. Crossroad Pub. 2001 Pg. 209

A teacher ought to be a stranger to the desire for domination, vainglory, and pride. A teacher should not be fooled by flattery, nor be blinded by gifts, conquered by the stomach, nor dominated by anger. A teacher should be patient, gentle and humble as far as possible; successfully tested and without partisanship, full of concern, and a lover of souls. Amma Theodora

Christ Jesus came to save sinners; he became human in order to make us human.

Olivera, Bernardo, O.C.S. O. *The Search for God: Conference, letters, and homilies*. Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Pub. 2002. Pg.90.

Nelson Mandela, after 27 years of imprisonment, said, "I now know that I must work as hard for the liberation of my oppressors as for the oppressed. I have to love those who have been oppressing me all these years."



Those who make peaceful evolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable.

John F. Kennedy

Truth is not something external to which we need only assent; rather, it is something in which we participate and for which we must take responsibility.

Luke Timothy Johnson. *How is the bible True?* Commonweal, 5/22/09 Pg. 15.

[The process of change in the butterfly.](#)

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle C 2013*. Pgs. 71-75.

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007*. Pgs. 70-73.

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2010*. Pgs. 57-60.

Release Your Captives

For twelve years I drank my coffee black and complained loudly over the necessity of setting out cream and sugar for my husband every meal. Then, while visiting relatives, I decided I preferred my coffee with cream. For weeks back home I struggled with pride, wanting to put cream in my coffee but fearing my husband's reaction. At last one morning I asked for the cream. He looked at me with surprise and asked simply, "How long have you been using cream?" and passed it to me. Joy! He had let me change. I was no longer trapped by my past behavior.

How hard it is to let other people change and grow! We box them in with our picture of them. We think, "He wouldn't want to do that. She's never done this before. They aren't interesting in that sort of thing."

Jesus allowed people to change. He expected great things of them. He let them respond as free individuals. Do We?"

Joyce Flight

Grana, Janice. [Images](#). Winona, Mn. St. Mary's College Press, 1976. *RELEASE YOUR CAPTIVES*. Page 67.