

Leave the Past Behind

The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.

Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"

"No one, Master."

"Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

(John 8:3-11, MSG)

In response to the Pharisees, Jesus stoops down and plays in the dirt. Much has been made about what exactly Jesus was doing or writing in the dirt, but, perhaps it misses the point. Perhaps it is the act of stooping down, getting down in the dirt, perhaps that is the important thing. Jesus got down in the dirt a lot. He stooped low for tax collectors, prostitutes, and a sundry array of sinners. The Pharisees stood. Insisting on an answer, they badgered Him.

Imagine the scene when He finally did stand, looked the accusers in the eye, and said "*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone*" (KJV). Then, He stooped back down again to the dirt.

It is important to note that all the condemnation comes from the religious, human characters in the story, not from Jesus. Jesus does not condemn. Jesus stoops down to the dirt. Not until all the accusers leave does he stand and tell the woman, "I do not condemn you. Go, and start over." It is the human in us that wants to accuse, to condemn, lashing out to destroy anything that goes outside of our narrow beliefs in how things should be. We even accuse, and condemn ourselves...

Jesus response of let the "sinless among you go first", cast the first stone, resonated with the accusers. The all left, one by one. But none stayed to receive Jesus unconditional love and forgiveness; except the woman accused. All the accusers went back to their old beliefs and hatred, to continue their lives as they began. Only the

woman stayed to begin a new life, a life of forgiveness and acceptance. She stayed voluntarily. There was no one left to accuse her, yet she stayed anyway.

Jesus offers something that human, religious accusers can never offer: acceptance, a second chance, a new life.

What kinds of things do you “accuse” yourself of?

Do you ever find yourself projecting your accusing self-thoughts on others?

Each day with Jesus is an opportunity for new beginnings. Jesus does not condemn us for past mistakes, He offers us second chances. We can stay with Him and accept His forgiveness, and forgive ourselves. Or, we can be like the Pharisees and return to our own judgmental lives, never knowing the love of Jesus.

Lord Jesus, You are the giver of second chances and new life. You are the resurrection of our lives. Help me to live each day in the reality of the second chance you offer. Help me stay voluntarily with you, and help me not project my own accusing nature on others. Amen.

It should be noted that this portion of the Gospel of John is not considered by most Biblical scholars to be part of the original writing, but was added later. It does however fit well into John's overall view of Jesus' purpose and message:

God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. (John 3:17)

If anyone hears what I am saying and doesn't take it seriously, I don't reject him. I didn't come to reject the world; I came to save the world. But you need to know that whoever puts me off, refusing to take in what I'm saying, is willfully choosing rejection. (John 12:47-48)

The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't now and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hid if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Lyrics: John Bell 1987
Traditional Scottish Melody