

Sermon Text: John 8:1-11

1But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. **2**At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. **3**The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group **4**and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. **5**In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" **6**They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. **7**When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." **8**Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. **10**Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" **11**"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

IT ALL HAS TO DO WITH FORGIVENESS

- I. Graciously offered,
- II. Gratefully received.

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Lent 2

St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church

Lake Mills, WI

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Ever since my son began attending the seminary two years ago, we've done a lot of talking about his professors and the things he's learning in class. Such discussions have jogged memories about my sem days and my professors. As I prepared my sermon for this weekend I recalled what one of my professors said about our work as pastors. He said "Gentlemen, when all is said and done, it comes down to forgiveness."

The point he was making was this: when it comes to encouraging families in their Christian living, when it comes to happiness in marriage, when it comes resolving differences between people, when it comes to comfort at the time of death and the hope of heaven, it all comes down to forgiveness.

That's the point from this account of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. As we consider these words we see that **IT ALL HAS TO DO WITH FORGIVENESS I. Graciously offered, II. Gratefully received.**

The event recorded in our text took place in the temple courts where Jesus would often teach the people who had gathered for the Jewish festivals. On this particular occasion the Pharisees and teachers of the law approached Jesus again, this time parading a woman whom they had caught in the act of adultery. They said that according to the Law of Moses such women were to be stoned to death and they were right, but they wanted to hear what Jesus had to say.

Now as John indicates, they were neither concerned about the woman nor about upholding the Law of Moses. They were using this woman to try and trap Jesus so that they would have evidence for a charge against him. If Jesus said "No," they could accuse him of being unfaithful to God's Word. If he said "Yes," they could charge him with insurrection against the Roman government which alone had the right to execute someone. Either way they thought they had Jesus trapped.

The all-knowing Jesus, however, could see their evil motives. At first, he wouldn't say anything, but bending down began writing on the ground with his finger. Finally, after much badgering Jesus said, "If anyone of you is without sin, let him cast the first stone at her."

What a masterful way in which Jesus dealt with his enemies. Rather than allow them to stand in self-righteous judgment of this woman, Christ turned the tables on them. Whatever they did or said would expose themselves as the hypocrites they really were. All they could do is sheepishly slip away in shame.

Our primary concern here is not so much with how Jesus dealt with his enemies, but how he lovingly dealt with this woman. Was she guilty? Sure she was, caught right in act. Did she deserve to be stoned? Sure she did. According to Deuteronomy 22, such women were to be stoned to death right on their father's doorstep. Even more, she deserved to be condemned eternally for God said, "The soul that sins shall die." But

for this guilty sinner, Christ had a solution. He lovingly, graciously offered her forgiveness when he said, "Neither do I condemn you."

How was that possible? How could Christ say to a guilty sinner "I do not condemn you?" Was Jesus soft on sin? Did he overlook it or sweep it under the rug? Like a magician did he snap his fingers and her sins magically disappeared? No, no, and no! It wasn't that easy. As her Savior he would take her guilt and sin and carry them to the cross himself, and there on that altar of God's justice he would win her forgiveness by suffering the punishment she deserved. So you see, it all has to do with forgiveness.

If someone were to ask "What's the big sin of our times?" what would you say? When we look at how our society treats premarital sex, casual divorces, extramarital affairs, same sex relationships, it's obvious that the 6th Commandment with its "You shall not commit adultery," is being trampled under foot. Sad to say, many-a-Christian has trampled it under foot too. But it's not just the 6th Commandment. We live in a society that tramples under the 4th Commandment with its disrespect for authority, as well as the 5th with its abortion on demand, and the 7th with its greed and materialism. There isn't one Commandment of our God that is not shattered by the acts of sinful human beings. And that's what we are, and what we deserve is something far worse than the shame that woman endured having her sin publicly exposed and something far worse than rocks and boulders crushing the life out of us. We deserve hell.

Thankfully, however, there is a solution. It all has to do with forgiveness. Jesus bent his back for us too, not to drag his finger in the sand in front of false accusers, but he bent his back to carry our sins to the cross to win our forgiveness too!. And what is more, he graciously, freely offers it to us in the gentle, comforting, beautiful gospel promise, "Son, daughter, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven."

II. Let's get on to the second point. I'd like to begin with this silly illustration. Did you hear about the man who went to the doctor and said, "Doctor, it hurts when I go like this," to which the doctor said, "If it hurts when you do that, then don't do that?"

Now we may laugh at such a "comy" joke, but I mention it because it illustrates what Jesus wants forgiven sinners to do. What I mean is this: if there's something we're doing that hurts us or others, if there's something that we're doing which is offensive to our holy God, then the obvious solution is to stop doing it. That's exactly the encouragement that Jesus gave to the woman caught in adultery whom he forgave. He not only said to her, "Neither do I condemn you," he also said, "Go now and leave your life of sin." Here was a woman whose life and reputation had been ruined by her sin of adultery. She deserved condemnation, but in Christ she received forgiveness. She deserved to die, but in Christ she found life. She had been caught doing the wrong thing, but in Christ she now had reason to do the right thing. How did this all happen? It all came down to forgiveness graciously offered, and by putting away her sin, she could show that that forgiveness was gratefully received! The gospels are filled with examples of this--when Zacchaeus received forgiveness, he paid back what he stole; forgiveness turned the denying Peter into the bold confessor, and it turned Paul from being a murderer to saving souls in Christ. Forgiveness graciously given, is gratefully received.

Are we grateful for the forgiveness we have received. Let's ask, "What should we do when we've sinned against someone? What are we to do when someone broke the marriage by adultery or by hateful words or actions? We are we to do when we are constantly arguing and fighting in our families? How are we to get over the grudge that we are holding against someone for something they have done against us? How are we to stop falling into our sin of weakness, whether it be lying, or stealing, or trying to control other people by aggressive behavior that is overt or passive? How are we to turn our lives around when we've made a mess of it with sin?" It all comes down to forgiveness! In Christ we have forgiveness for any and everything we have done wrong. In gratefulness we want to put away our sin, and with his help we can stop doing what is hurting ourselves and others, and offending our holy God. We can put away sin in our lives. We can do everything through him who gives us strength.

There is also application for us on a congregational level in how we deal with one another. Yes, we are to oppose and condemn sin and we want to encourage Godly living, but not by using others for personal self-righteous gain like the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, but to gain the fallen person. Regarding this matter, one of my seminary professors said, "Always remember that in opposing sin, our goal is not to cleanse the church of sinners, but to cleanse sinners in the church."

And so you see, when it comes to our living for Christ in this life and when it comes to living with him in the life to come, it all comes down to forgiveness--graciously offered and gratefully received. Amen.