

## Throwing Rocks

**Intro.** People have a fascination with others' failures. A recent headline screamed about a celebrity's divorce settlement. Nothing gathers a crowd like *someone else* being punished. Probably the worst was the practice of public hangings and firing squads, some legal, some not. Less fatal but humiliating was the practice of putting people in stocks for hours in the town square for all to laugh at and insult. Offenders had their head and hands locked in place. A fight in the schoolyard attracts more observers than those trying to break it up. The gospel is an example of how people in the Lord's time were also attracted to someone else's misfortune.

**I.** The enemies of the Lord never ran out of imaginative schemes to try and trick him into saying or doing something that would get him in trouble with the authorities or the people. The Pharisees dragged one half of the guilty couple into the crowd gathered around him and challenged him to follow

the law or ignore it; punishment or mercy. Either way the Pharisees thought the Lord would lose. Many people have wondered what the Lord was doing on the ground; drawing pictures of the Pharisees, writing their own sins or just doodling. It is impossible to know. What we do know is the Lord ignored their question, hoping they would realize their own sin and go away. When they didn't, he challenged them by inviting the ones without sin be the first to throw a stone. Upon further review, the elders had the sense to abandon the charade. *They* didn't follow the law because according to Leviticus chapter 20, the man should have been punished too.

The real point of this story is the way the Lord treated the woman. I think she was so scared about what she had done and was about to happen to her that she didn't hear any of the conversation between the Lord and the Pharisees. She finally realized the Lord was talking to her. He didn't yell at her and embarrass her further. He gently asked where her

accusers were and then she heard the unexpected words of forgiveness. Confused, she stumbled off down the street trying to understand what just happened. When she realized she was not going to die, I think in relief she cried and laughed all the way home. Some of us have experienced that kind of forgiveness. I have. Like others in scripture, we don't know what became of her. Maybe she was in the crowd at the cross and the upper room.

**Concl.** Today's gospel was cherished by the early Christian community because it showed how the Lord treated the woman with gentleness, compassion and forgiveness. The woman was used by the Pharisees as a "prop" to trap the Lord. The Lord was respectful to the woman and helped her begin to regain a sense of her own dignity. Through God's forgiveness of **our** sin, we too are restored to the dignity as children of God. We must do the same for one another and not be so quick to condemn each other. We know well the dreadful feeling when we realize our sinfulness. We know too how heavy it is to carry our guilt, sometimes for years. While there

are consequences to sin that we may not escape, the Lord forgives us when we sincerely ask. God moves on. It can be difficult for us to move on. If we can feel what the woman felt when she heard those words, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and do not sin anymore," maybe we can move on, changed people, unwilling to be so quick to pick up stones to throw at each other. **None of us wants to be defined or remembered for our worst day.**

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