

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 15th June 2008

Being Witnesses with Jesus – in the temple courts

John 8:1-11

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon The text this week is probably not infact an original writing of John because it is absent from all major Greek manuscripts that would bear strong witness to John's original text. However, there is enough tradition and ancient evidence that there is authenticity to this account. It has much more in common with the Synoptic writings of Matthew Mark, and Luke than it does with John's work. It is a typical synoptic gospel story in that people would try and put Jesus to the test and put Him in a dilemma.

We find Jesus in the temple courts again teaching. A crowd are gathered and listening to him and then into the scene arrive some teachers of the law and Pharisees. They are dragging a woman who has been "caught in adultery. We see **a contrast between the self-satisfied religious police on the one hand and the idea of a woman, who recognizes her true condition**, is the contrast between those who will accept or reject Christ. Often **people who have a real grasp of their needs are the same people who will grasp grace and receive Jesus forgiveness**. People who do not understand their true condition or needs, after a while can become self-satisfied and are often those who try to bring judgement on others, unable to exercise grace...It is clear that **the Pharisees are trying to catch Jesus out**. According to the law we have a problem - the law required that both parties were to be condemned, the man and the woman. The Pharisees basically violated the law by not bringing him before Jesus. Next **they try to use the Law to trap Jesus**. - They are ready to violate the Law of Moses in an attempt to trap Jesus. So, this trap was set to put Him in a dilemma. Here is the problem. If Jesus condemned her to be stoned, what would that have done to His message? It would have made Him look uncompassionate and ungraceful and also that He was no longer someone whose message of forgiveness could be taken seriously. What if He set her free? Then it would be a violation of the law. So, **they are pitting Jesus against Moses**.

But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. Many have wondered what He wrote! Some think one of the following verses [Jeremiah 17:13](#), [Exodus 23:1](#): [Exodus 31](#), It says in *Exodus* that they were written by the finger of God. So, it was with His finger that He was writing in the sand and it would be an allusion to that imagery. It would be an indirect, but visual, claim to His deity. There are all sorts of possibilities!

Instead of passing judgment on this woman we see that He turns it back on the judges. "But when they persisted He straightened up and said **'He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'**." **Jesus calls them to see the truth of their own hearts and actions**. Jesus does not directly point to their sin but instead He casts light on the situation... In verse 12 you can see that Jesus is saying "I am the light of the world" Light reveals things...in this way Jesus reveals sins. In this case **the woman knew she had a problem and they did not**. When we read the gospels, so often we see that the people who accept Jesus and His message of freedom, forgiveness and salvation are those who are most aware of their own need. They are most aware of their condition, of their baggage, of their vulnerability, of their poverty. When Jesus gives attention to people in great need, it is undivided attention. He completely reduces His world to their needs and focuses on them, while His disciples are often more interested in moving on! You and I are also the recipients of God's love and attention...

When faced with their own sin the Pharisees slip away from the temple one by one. For the woman Jesus says simply "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you? **Neither do I condemn you.**" and having met with Jesus forgiveness the woman is left with a call from Jesus to "sin no more" But what of these Pharisees? What is holding them still in their seemingly self righteous world? It is sad indeed that when faced with the light of the world, Jesus, they decide to merely slip away. Perhaps they are ashamed or frightened. Maybe they are annoyed that they cannot get their own way. Perhaps they have grown used to pointing the finger at others instead of looking in their own mirror. Perhaps they choose not to take responsibility for their sinful condition and in doing so miss the key that unlocks the door to wholeness.

This passage has much to say to us about forgiveness and judgement. Jesus always gives us choice but he calls us to forgiveness. He does this clearly in Matthew 6 verse 12. "Forgive our sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us". Then look ahead to verse 14. There are echoes of the verse Judge not or you will be judged. We can read the story of the unforgiving debtor in Matthew 18 – 21-35. Many of us struggle with forgiveness. It has been our way to either condemn ourselves or others. Often in the church we find extraordinary battles with Christian judging others or bearing grudges or resentments. Jesus is quite clear both in His actions and His words that we must forgive but how? Many of us we may have good reason in our backgrounds or lives to warrant a real struggle with

forgiveness and we can go on blaming our past for our present behaviour. That is not to say that our past experiences do not influence our present behaviour. Indeed they do and Jesus understands that – but in Jesus and in finding and choosing forgiveness we can grow. We can be free of any condemnation – Just as the woman caught in adultery was freed by Jesus. Look at what Jesus went through for us - Isaiah 53 verse 4-5... Jesus took all our weaknesses, pain, sin and suffering on himself on the cross. Turn to 1 John 1 verse 9.

We have no right to withhold God's forgiveness from ourselves. That is a sin of pride. Jesus is desperate for us to receive forgiveness. Often we find it hard to forgive others because we have not allowed ourselves to be forgiven. **When we do learn to forgive ourselves and others then we become counter culture.** In today's "Blame culture" society we are surrounded by people making judgements on others. **It is easy to become a witness to gossip and condemnation rather than a witness to Christ.**

This term are considering what it is to be witnesses with Jesus. The witness of not judging others or ourselves is great indeed. If you and I can only see ourselves as Jesus sees us. If we can learn to daily receive God's forgiveness and to offer it to others. If we can learn not to judge others thoughts and hearts but to love people then we will indeed be witnesses to Jesus in this world.

I don't know how each of us feel about this passage. I expect that it touches each of us in a different way. Whether we are relating to the woman who had been named and shamed or who knew of her sin or indeed the Pharisees who have spent years hiding from their real selves in the public image of being "Righteous religious leaders" we have an opportunity to receive God's forgiveness. Perhaps we have been guilty of making judgements about someone else – we can ask to be forgiven. Imagine that if we are right with Christ, forgiven and forgiving, loved and loving, not condemned or condemning.... imagine the impact of the light of Christ within us shining out to our neighbours and the wider community.

Remember this – Jesus says "Neither do I condemn you". Look up Psalm 103 v 12 For there is no condemnation for those who live in Christ.

Witness: questions to discuss

1 Discuss why you think the Pharisees did not stay and listen to Jesus teaching? What was it that still held them in their pain and sin unable to receive Jesus forgiveness? Perhaps it was pride...

2/ What do you think was going on in Jesus' mind when he wrote in the ground?

3/ How aware are you of your own "condition"? Do you feel able to be vulnerable before the Lord?

4/ Discuss forgiveness and judgement of both ourselves and others? How can we be right with God? In what ways can unforgiveness affect your life and others?

5/ Spend time quietly reflecting and in prayer. Decide to accept that Jesus has forgiven you. Decide to forgive others. Remember Psalm 103.