

## In the Midst of the Crowd

Fifth Sunday of Lent – John 8: 1-11

In the midst of a crowd, an unknown woman is brought before Jesus accused of a crime by a number of unknown accusers. In ancient Israel, as it is today, crowd mentality does two things. It promotes and enflames a sense of outrage over a perceived wrong. It also can lead to a loss of justice, giving way to devastating consequences.

The practice of stoning a person to death was an anonymous approach to capital punishment. There was no single executioner. There was no way of knowing who threw the stone that led to the death. It was (and is) a cruel and merciless way to carry out one's own idea of righteousness. At the time of Jesus, it was a common practice.

However, the gospel today is not about the obvious impending murder or the crime committed by the woman. This is a story about all of us and our potential to seek revenge instead of mercy. This story illustrates the desire of the leaders to trick Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees are seeking a way to trap Jesus, hoping he will fail to uphold both Roman law and the Law of Moses. It doesn't work.

**“Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?”** Jesus does something so powerful. In the midst of this crowd, **“Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger.”** I can only imagine that his silence was deafening. They persist in their inquiry. His response embodies both justice and mercy. **“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”** He then continued to quietly draw in the dirt.

Jesus has broken into the crowd mentality, broken into their consciousness, while upholding fidelity to the Law. **“And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.”**

The crowd is gone. The only two left to finish the story is Jesus and the woman. Jesus offers to her what he offers to each one of us, mercy. **“Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She replied, No one, sir. Then Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more.”**

In the midst of the crowd, in our own community, we have opportunities to return to God for our own selfish act of wrong choices. We also have the opportunity to show mercy instead of revenge on those who have hurt us. Lent is the time for each of us to step out of the crowd into the midst of God's free and loving forgiveness.

Happy Lent!

  
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