

*Forgive  
because  
you have been forgiven*



**30 May, 2021**

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*God! You are my God! I cannot get enough of You! I've worked up such hunger and thirst for You, traveling across dry and weary deserts. So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open, drinking in Your strength and glory. In Your generous love I am really living at last! My lips brim praises like fountains. I bless You every time I take a breath; My arms wave like banners of praise to you! (Psalm 63:1-4)*

### **HYMN    Alleluia Sing to Jesus**

#### **PRAYER**

When God speaks, He breathes life and sustenance to all that exists.

When Jesus gave His life on the cross, all that is broken and worn out is re-created and renewed.

When the Holy Spirit stirs our soul, God's plan for new creation, compassion, joy, and community is released.

Life-giving, life-restoring, life-fulfilling God; may our whole lives be worship. In all things, may we seek to reflect your love and your hope, and give you all the glory!    **AMEN.**

### **HYMN    Blessed Assurance Jesus is Mine**

#### **PRAYER FOR OUR WORLD**

Heavenly Father, We worship you as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Lord Jesus, we worship you, Savior and Lord of the world. Holy Spirit, we worship you, sanctifier of we the people of God.

Heavenly Father, we pray that this day and every day, we may live in your presence, and delight in You more and more. As families enjoy an extended weekend and half term break, we pray they stay safe and you

keep them protected from this deadly virus. We ask for wisdom that we may not get complacent and careless in protecting ourselves and others around us.

We remember families all over the world, who have lost a dear one to COVID, and others who have experienced suffering among loved ones. Jesus promised, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted; those who grieve shall be consoled.* May those who mourn and grieve know the reality of Your comfort and consolation.

We pray Your intervention against the rampant evil that possesses our world, wanton gun-crimes, hate crimes against people who are different, gender crimes against men, women and children rooted in perverted and depraved minds, crimes against entire races of people that wipe out their culture, language and way of life cherished for thousands of years, and crimes of intolerance against people who think and behave differently. Loving Father, may those who survive such horrific crimes know and experience Your incredible love, and grant them such healing that they would find it in their hearts to forgive and move into happier times and fulfilling relationships.

As for me and my family, here and everywhere, I pray that this day you will fill each us with Your Holy Spirit and allow the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, ripen in each of our lives, that other may see and know, how wonderful it is to have You as Loving Father and Almighty God. In the Name of Jesus, our Redeemer, Restorer and Saviour. **AMEN.**

**HYMN**     **And can it be, that I should gain ...**

**READING**                     **John 8:1-11**

Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them.

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 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.”*

## **LISTEN    God be Merciful to Me**

### **MESSAGE**

Last Sunday we saw the religious leaders of the Jews intensify their campaign to discredit Jesus<sup>1</sup>. His growing popularity among curiosity seekers and ardent followers alike, left religious leaders feeling quite threatened.

John’s chronology lets us know, Jesus remained in Jerusalem for a few days after the Feast of Tabernacles; He returned to the Mount of Olives for the night, and early the next morning, He was back at the Temple, teaching (8:1).

There is an inexplicable power that draws people to the Word of God, because the Word of God presents Truth without condemnation. There are many instances where the Word of God is used to intimidate people into submission, but that is not God’s purpose for His Word. The Word **TORAH**, referring to the

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<sup>1</sup> Similar attempts to discredit Jesus found in the Gospels: Matthew 16:1; 19:3; 22:35; Mark 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; Luke 10:25; 11:16.

first five books<sup>2</sup> of the Older Testament, is been translated into English as **LAW**. The Jew to whom it was given, understood the contents of these five books as **INSTRUCTION** or **TEACHING!** When God gave Moses the Law, His intention was neither to encourage nor promote a society submissive to a strict adherence of the law. The TORAH was to teach people how to live a Holy life honouring God, making them different and distinct from people living around them.

So we expect to read, Jesus “taught” His Disciples and the people who gathered around Him. Jesus was concerned that people lived under a false assumption, that obeying the Law the way the Pharisees enforced it, was the **only** way to please God and earn His favour. Jesus introduced us to His Father whom He knew well, a loving and caring Father, whose main purpose was to cleanse us from sin, that we might freely enter His presence, know Him as “Father”, and enjoy eternity in His home, which is Heaven!

Our text today narrates a shameful incident which should never have taken place, except that a group of shameless people forced it to happen. Similar incidents take place daily across the world, where shame and shaming are used as a double edged sword. The most vulnerable in many societies are women and children, for no other reason than, the absence of protection under the law (mostly through a self-serving, mal-interpretation of the Law).

John sets the scene for us, *Whilst He was teaching in the Temple, the religious scholars and the Pharisees broke through the crowd and brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery and made her stand in the middle of everyone....*

There was no need to make a public spectacle of the woman. She could have been kept in private custody, while the case was referred to Jesus, but those who brought her were not seeking justice. John makes it clear, this was grand-standing, an attempt by the powerful religious elite to create maximum impact through an ostentatious distraction, to divert the attention of the public away from Jesus’ teaching. By publicly embarrassing the woman, they would get to

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

Jesus. They wanted the public dialogue agenda brought back to into their comfort-zone: enforcing the Law.

These religious personalities *were testing Jesus because they hoped to trap him with his own words and accuse him of breaking the laws of Moses (8:6)*, which reads, “*If a man commits adultery with his neighbour’s wife, both the man and the woman who have committed adultery must be put to death*”<sup>3</sup>

The accusers committed a colossal tactical blunder. In their single-minded pursuit of discrediting Jesus, their charge contained information sufficient to expose their hypocrisy. They emphatically declared that the poor woman had been caught “in the very act.” So saying, they let slip an important point: they knew the identity of the male participant! **Where then, was the man?** The Old Testament code demanded that both the adulteress and the adulterer be subjected to the same penalty (see footnote 2 below). These sanctimonious prosecutors were in stark violation of the law.

Watching the scene unfold, those present at this incident (and later Jewish readers of this text) would have thought, there is a lot more to this *drama* than meets the eye!

**First**, in the annual cycle of daily readings in Synagogues, this law would have been familiar to most Jews; they would have rightly thought, *Why is the man not here?* Is there a hidden agenda? What/Whom are they covering up?

**Second**, Jewish scholars have postulated, the omission of the man suggests he might have been socially prominent, perhaps even one of the religious leaders, which explains why they closed ranks and shielded the man.

**Third**, from a legal point of view, the standard of evidence needed for adultery was very high. The claim that she was *caught in the act of adultery*, implied there had to have been at least two witnesses. They had to have seen the sexual act take place (*voyeurism* of sorts), and their witness accounts had

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<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24 and Job 31:11

to agree perfectly. Seeing the pair leave the room together, or even lying on the same bed together was not “evidence”. The admission of evidence in an adultery case was so stringent, it could be met only on rare occasions. Such evidence would have been nigh impossible, were it not a setup.

**Finally**, for this to be a setup, pre-arranged spies would have been sent to “witness” the act, carefully noting intimate details. The text also suggests, having been **caught** in the act, the woman was hastily brought in front of Jesus, she might well have been immodestly dressed.

Such thoughts would have crossed the minds of many in the crowd when the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees stood the hapless woman in front of Jesus, taunting Him with the question, *“Doesn’t Moses’ law command us to stone to death a woman like this? Tell us, what do you say we should do with her?”*

The religious authorities presented Jesus with a problem they believed would impale him on the horns of a dilemma. Jesus responds, *If you want to play by the rules, let’s bring the rules into play.* So He quotes the Law, *“The Law requires those who witnessed the act of adultery, to be the first to throw the first stones in the execution.”*<sup>4</sup>

One-by-one they leave silently, beginning with the oldest, who understood their game of one-upmanship was over! By their quiet retreat, they acknowledged their guilt.

Human history is one in which we accuse and condemn others, sometimes with ulterior motive, and sometimes simply “following the herd” because it seems the right thing to do.

To us, readers in another age and time, to whom cultural norms and customs seem alien, the Truth stands stark: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who don’t walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 17:7

<sup>5</sup> Romans 7:24 – 8:1

I am glad, the powers that be, obeyed the promoting of the Holy Spirit and included this incident in John's Gospel. It is the story of redemption that blends a lovely note of grace ("*Neither do I condemn you*") with a challenge to live life at a higher standard ("*Go and journey your way in life, but from now on, sin no more - leave your past life, and live a new life*").

There are those who revel in the thrill of exercising power to condemn; this incident tell us, Jesus knows the thrill of exercising the power to forgive.

Is there someone you know who needs to hear the voice of release from condemnation? If God through Christ has forgiven you and released you to a "hope-filled" life ahead, shouldn't you do the same? After all, we do pray, *Father! Forgive us our sin, AS we for those who sin against us.*

Every time we forgive those who hurt us, bells ring across Heaven in celebration and Jesus says to His Father, *My life, death and resurrection was not in vain!*

**AMEN.**

## **PRAYER**

Almighty God! Your Son Jesus our Christ, demonstrated Your love through the most powerful act of forgiveness. Now we know,

Forgiveness results in mercy.

Forgiveness results in unending love.

Forgiveness results in overwhelming compassion.

Forgiveness results in the blotting out all acts of wrong.

Forgiveness results in the washing away of my sins in thought,  
word and deed

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise, for YOU alone are Worthy!

**HYMN    There is therefore, now no condemnation**



## **BENEDICTION**

We have reflected on our own weaknesses and on the frailty of others.

Jesus says, '*Go and sin no more*'. So we go, no longer accusing ourselves of sins that have been forgiven, nor condemning others for the sins that God has forgiven them.

As receivers of God's grace, we ask for help to be grace-givers in the week ahead. In the name of Christ . **AMEN.**

**MUSIC to make Coffee and enjoy Cake**