

Homily
April 3, 2022
5th Sunday of Lent
20:21-34:18

These past two weeks prior to today, we heard parables. One of the fig tree and the other of the two sons and the father. Today we do not hear a parable. We hear an event, an actual encounter.

Jesus with a woman.

Jesus with a crowd.

Jesus with his opposers.

This is a unique story – event – that’s found only in the Gospel according to John, but it actually has the flavor and the overtones of coming from St. Luke. Some scripture scholars think it’s a later addition to John’s Gospel account by someone who thought, “Well this sounds like...” Well, it doesn’t matter, really. It’s a powerful moment in the life of Jesus.

And here she is, the woman. Do you see her? Standing in the middle. This woman is being **shamed**. The first shame is **being caught** in the very act of adultery. The second shame is she’s **being exposed** – to the entire crowd in the Temple. And the third shame, she is **being used**.

What has she done? She has broken the Mosaic Law, written in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. In Deuteronomy and Leviticus, it says that if a man and a woman are caught in the act of adultery, they are to die.

In Deuteronomy again, just after the earlier passage about a man and a woman to die, it talks about a virgin, one betrothed, caught in adultery. And she and her adulterous partner are to be stoned. So we can assume in part, that this woman standing here, shamed thrice, is a youth, a young woman. And she’s threatened with stoning.

But there’s someone missing. Her partner. He’s not there. He’s supposed to be there. Why is he not there? He’s been excluded. Not from the event, but because the elders want to trip Jesus up. And so they bring the more vulnerable one. And she stands there, rightfully accused, but falsely judged - for she should not be standing there alone. And she’s being unrightfully used by the elders.

These elders who are angry at Jesus. He frightens them. They are jealous of him in John’s Gospel, because the truth that he speaks at times challenges not only their teaching authority, but their

complete understanding of Mosaic Law, of which they are the experts. They don't like it. And so, in their rigidity, a radical rigidity to defend the Law, they twist it to their own purpose against Jesus and victimize - three times - this young woman.

They're not alone. There's a crowd in the temple and they all have stones. (Yeah. I'm not a baseball player. [- Tossing the stone...]) Stones! Maybe it's their favorite stone. I'm not sure. This is a really nice one. It's smooth and yet it has pointy edges. Can you imagine throwing this at someone?

But they have their stones and they're just waiting. Waiting to see what Jesus says. They're going to trap him. And then they are probably going to stone her. (Holding up the stone...) This is their tool in their hands. It's a tool of anger. It's a tool of self-righteous judgment. It's a tool of evil purpose. And they clutch it close for its use.

So you know, they test Jesus. And what does he do? He gets down and doodles in the dirt with his finger! What is he doodling? He does it twice. The first time, it's just a response to the challenge. But then he stands up and he has that line that we all know only too well. "Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone." And then he's back on the ground, doodling some more.

Have you ever wondered what he was doodling, writing in the dirt? There's only one passage in all of Scripture that speaks of that. It's Jeremiah 17:13, where it says, "Those who would abandon God will have their names written in the dirt, for they have abandoned the fountain of life."

But what's he writing? Some say it was probably their names. The accusers. We know that in the Old Testament, to know someone's name was to have power over the one. That's why as we heard recently, "I AM, Who Am," that great smart aleck response from God? Because no one is going to have power over God, through a name. Perhaps that's what he was doing. Exposing them.

Or perhaps, it is conjectured that, he was doodling their sins. I could see that, with John's Gospel account. Jesus is powerful. He is knowing. And it's a constant projection.

But then, they all walk away. The anger has been deflated. The envy. They all walk away. The elders who brought the accusation first, and then the crowd that they had incited.

What a waste of a good stone. But have you ever wondered as they walked away – what did they do with their stone? You kind of get used to it. Have you wondered if, as they walked away, **dropped** the stone? That's a possibility. (Drops the stone. [Where'd you go? There you are.] Picks up

the stone.) Or did they ***clutch it*** even tighter with interior anger and envy and fear? Waiting for another opportunity.

Brothers and sisters, everyone of us here knows shame. Right? There has been a moment in your life when you have been exposed to shame. I was never a great baseball player. I played the right field. You know why? Because nobody hits to the right field. That wasn't really a shaming moment, but I've had other moments and I know you have too. Where you're standing there and somehow someone puts you in a place that you don't want to be and points the finger at some skill that you lack, some mistake that you made, or even sadly, some sin that you have committed. And they point at you, and they shame you for it.

Many of us would also know what it is to have the *truth twisted*, to have the *rules twisted*, either - against us, yes? By someone who wants to get something out of us. Or we even would know how at times **we** have twisted the rules to get something we wanted. And we did it and someone suffered because of it.

But more to the point, we have our stones, don't we? Those things we would hurl at another: Words, text messages, emails, posts to social media. We have a lot of effective stone-throwing equipment. Don't we? Besides our face-to-face moments.

I wonder if it would be good for us to let go of those stones, or their use for evil intent. And instead place in our hands the cross (Holding up the cross) and rather than stones, clutch **it** for the gift of redemption. The gift of redemption given to the woman when everybody walked away. And Jesus didn't condemn, but rather sent her on the way with the urging of redemption, "Avoid this sin."

I would much prefer this (the cross), but I know how tempting this (the stone) is. Stone or cross.

May we choose redemption