

JOHN 8:3-11 – JESUS AND THE WRITING ON THE GROUND



³The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

⁸Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

¹⁰Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Group Reflection:

The text we have just read in John may be may be part of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 17:13:

*O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame.
Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken
the Lord, the spring of living water.*

and that what Jesus was writing was their names. Let's look for some evidence.

1) The accusers did not present the law correctly. Not only was stoning not prescribed by law but the law required the execution of both the woman and the man (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). The accusers could have kept the woman in private custody while they questioned Jesus. But they looked the other way from the adulterous man and paraded the woman in public to humiliate her.

2) It was a trap because the Jewish people were stripped of their authority to execute anyone by the Roman occupiers. If Jesus gave permission to proceed with the execution, He would have been prosecuted for violating Roman law. If Jesus would have said that Roman law was above Mosaic law and said no to the execution, He would have been prosecuted by the Temple authorities.

3) The accusers did not drop their rocks and walk away because they were either conscience-stricken people or penitent contemplatives. Jesus had previously exposed them for their self-righteous and self-important behaviour and judgements.

4) Jesus' action of writing in the ground must be of importance. Among the most popular theories is that Jesus was writing the sins of the accusers into the dusty ground. The passage, however, says "they kept on questioning Him" while He was writing. After Jesus made His famous one sentence response to all this, "Let he who is without sin throw the first stone," He crouched back down and kept writing.

5) Being "written in the dust" (literally the earth) is a reference to the destiny of our death. As it says in Genesis and we repeat each Ash Wednesday and at funerals: "you are dust and into dust you will return."

6) The combination of this powerful gesture and Jesus' one line answer overwhelmed the accusers into silence. However, Jesus does not tell the woman "your sins are forgiven" as He had told others. He does not say, "I condemn you and forgive you." Remarkably, Jesus informs her He is not condemning her, then states something to her that He tells all of us as well, "Leave your life of sin." Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death.

Question time

How can this text help you to reflect on *relationship not rules* in the following areas:

- a) The work of the Mothers' Union in your diocese and globally
- b) The membership of the Mothers' Union in your diocese and globally
- c) Your own behaviour towards your family, friends, fellow members and strangers?

End with a prayer from the suggested Prayers' Pack or one of your own.