

John 8:1-12 - A Stone's Throw From Death

August 14, 2016

Jordan

Good morning and thanks for joining us at the CrossWinds "family reunion!" We hope you enjoy the corn and the homemade food, but more importantly we hope you have a chance to meet someone from the "other side" of your church family. We talk a lot about being a multisite church and the benefits that come from that. Today is a tangible expression of that blessing and we encourage you to renew old friendships or build new ones as we work together as one church with the common vision of reaching Northwest Iowa with the good news of Jesus Christ.

This morning Pastor Kurt and I have short Bible lesson from John 8. Without a doubt, this is one of the most unusual passages in the Bible—not necessarily because of what it says (though it is scandalous), but because there is a big debate on whether it is supposed to even be in the Bible. If you look at the footnotes in your Bible they will tell you the oldest manuscripts do not have this story and because of that, many people ignore this story in the Gospel of John

This morning is not the time to jump into the question of whether it should be in the Bible or not. The truth is, the Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus that are similar to his actions right here. So while it isn't in the oldest manuscripts of John, we have no reason to believe it isn't historically true. Let's read what happened.

Kurt

John 8:1-12

What is this story telling us about Jesus that the ancient writers wanted us to know? The best way to answer that question is to use your imagination to travel back in time and picture how this story might have unfolded. In your mind, move from the green corn fields of Iowa to the dusty brown roads in the ancient city of Jerusalem.

This story took place during a national holiday called the Feast of Booths. For the Feast of Booths people poured into Jerusalem from around the nation. This holiday wasn't just for families. Mosaic law required all men living within 20 miles of Jerusalem to attend the feast in the city. It was a holiday where the city was not just filled with families but it was filled with men, lonely men.

Jordan

The Feast of Booths was a Jewish holiday to remind Israel of God's grace on their nation in the past. Think of it like Jewish Thanksgiving. It was a time to be thankful for God's goodness in the past as well as in the present.

The book of Exodus tells us of a time when Israel was enslaved in Egypt, but God miraculously intervened and delivered them from slavery. For the next 40 years, the people of Israel wandered the wilderness between Egypt and Israel, a time when God continually provided for his people. As they wandered, the people of Israel lived in tents called "booths." That's what this festival remembered: the "Feast of Booths" celebrated God's provision for Israel.

Every morning for 40 years, God gave them food so they could survive. Remember! They were in the wilderness! God the Provider provided their daily bread.

After 40 years, Israel entered the Promised Land. They were able to dwell in houses. They were able to grow their own food. God continued to provide for them, but in a different way.

But God never wanted them to forget where they came from. Each year, after the wheat and barley harvests were stored for the winter, God commanded Israel to gather in Jerusalem to celebrate God's provision in the here and now through the harvest just like he did generations ago in the wilderness.

To make it even more tangible, everyone would build booths for the festival. These were temporary tents made of branches woven together. Imagine camping without your tent from REI or Scheels. They were flimsy structures that didn't provide much privacy. These booths were *everywhere*—along streets, alleys, rooftops, you name it. Overnight Jerusalem would transform into a shanty town with tents in every free square foot of the city.

Kurt

Many of the people who came to Jerusalem for the holiday had hearts filled with gratitude to God for his care in the past and his harvest in the present. But as often happens with religious holidays that are celebrated year after year, for many Jews the Festival of Booths deteriorated into a weeklong drinking party with little spiritual significance. This is when our story took place.

While we don't know exactly what happened. I imagine that as the rays of dawn broke the morning, most of the city was sprawled on the floor of their flimsy

stick shelters sleeping off a hangover. Of course, in the morning the religious elite wouldn't be drunk. They would have risen at the crack of dawn to make their way to the temple for morning worship. As they walked the streets, they wove their way through the tents of the groggy party-goers. This was the perfect atmosphere for the religious elite to develop a holier-than-thought attitude.

We don't know much about the woman in the story. We just know that as the Scribes and Pharisees made their way to the temple for worship she was in one of those flimsy shelters that didn't provide enough privacy. Someone that knew her and they stumbled upon her in the very act of adultery. There is nothing in the text that tells us she was a prostitute. In fact the punishment of stoning that the religious leaders prescribed for her offense was a punishment reserved for an engaged woman that was unfaithful to her future spouse.

Maybe her fiancée was not able to be in Jerusalem for the holiday. Maybe he was a traveling merchant that was out of the country in Egypt or Syria closing a deal. We don't know why he wasn't there. Apparently he left her alone in the city for one of the happiest times of the year.

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Maybe out of loneliness she went with a friend to a late night party. There she found friendship, singing and dancing while the wine flowed freely until the early morning hours. I imagine her eyes met the glances of a young man sitting across the room staring at her beauty.

He was probably darkly tanned and muscular from hours spent harvesting the fields. Like many men, he was probably at the festival alone. That night two lonely hearts found a bit of comfort in a new friendship. I imagine that as the

evening wore on she realized her heart was beating faster. For the first time in months she felt passion instead of loneliness. When the wine combined with her feelings and the lateness of the hour, she began to feel carried away. She was drawn to him. The alcohol had weakened her sense of right and wrong.

As the party closed, neither of them wanted to be alone. Sometime during the night they found themselves standing together at the entrance of his tent. At this point, we can imagine what happened. We don't need the details. All we need to know is that in those early morning hours of weakness, they had a sexual affair.

Kurt

That is when the Scribes and Pharisees were weaving their way through the scattered tents on the streets. Someone she knew stumbled upon them in the very act. While we don't know exactly how it unfolded, I imagine one of the self-righteous Pharisees raising his voice in full-throated condemnation as he shouted her name. Apparently the man escaped. All we know is she was left behind with shock and shame as she grabbed for her clothes. I picture the religious leaders encircling her like a pack of ravenous wolves as she begged for mercy in her shame.

Can you picture the tears streaming down her face? Can you imagine the thoughts that raced through her mind as these holy men terrorized her?

She was lonely. She had too much too drink. In the vividness of the new day, she could see the darkness of her sin from the night.

Unfortunately her spiritual leaders were not there to help her but to shame her. They didn't want to heal her they wanted to hurt her.. They wanted to destroy her life.

I imagine them herding her through the streets to the temple like an animal being led to the slaughter. They struck her again and again not with their fists but with their insults. Slut! Whore! Adulterous!. As they herded her up one street and down another people came to their windows to see the all-too-public shaming of the woman caught in the act of sin.

Now, everyone knew about her sin. Her fiancé would never forgive her. Her hopes and dreams of a future and a family were destroyed. Her dreams of becoming a respectable wife and mother were gone forever. Like leeches, they were sucking away any hope of forgiveness and healing. They were determined to leave her with nothing but an empty shell of existence.

Jordan

And so they brought her into the temple, but when they arrived, they saw Jesus. Ah, Jesus, the carpenter's son from Nazareth. Jesus, the backwater Galilean. Jesus, the teacher who refused to "play along" with the Pharisees. The Pharisees may have hated this woman. But their hatred for Jesus was far greater.

The Bible tells us the motive of these religious leaders was not as pure as it looked. They were not interested in cleaning up the moral filth in the neighborhood. They simply wanted to use this woman as bait to trap Jesus. They wanted to trap Jesus. The law said an engaged woman that committed adultery should be stoned. If Jesus upheld the law, the people would turn against him

because of his lack of compassion. If her didn't uphold the law, they could accuse him of disregarding the Scriptures. What would he do? They had him either way he turned.

The Pharisees shoved her onto the ground in front of Jesus. "This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. What should we do with her? Should we stone her?" Silence fell over the crowd. How would Jesus respond?

In the face of this "trap," Jesus did something unexpected. He remained silent and kneeled to the ground and began writing. Everyone in the crowd craned their necks to see what Jesus was doing and what he was writing. Of course, we don't know what he wrote, but we know that for the first time the eyes of everyone were off that broken woman and on the finger of God.

Kurt

A friend of mine has a theory. He thinks Jesus reached back in the corridors of time to bring forward the names of women these Pharisees and Scribes had been with in an inappropriate way and he wrote them on the ground. I don't know if that is true. While we don't know what Jesus wrote, we do know what he said.

Jesus straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw the stone at her." Then he returned to writing on the ground.

Isn't that the way Pharisees are today? They are quick to point the finger at what is wrong with everyone else but they ignore what is wrong with themselves. They scream gossip when they hear the slightest unkind word but they are quick to pass on a juicy tidbit of information as a prayer request. They

will tell you what is wrong with your life but they will avoid any introspection about their own life.

One by one the religious leaders walked away from her beginning with the older ones to the younger as each of them realized they also had sin in their life.

Finally Jesus stood up and faced the woman for the first time. “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir.”

Jordan

Imagine how overwhelmed this woman was. Her entire life, she had respected the morality and uprightness of the religious leaders. But they had tried to ruin her life. Now they were gone, and somehow she was even more frightened. This man who seemed to be even more moral, more upright, more in-tune with God's law was before her. What would he do? Surely Jesus would punish her.

Jesus was the only one that could condemn her that morning. Jesus is the only one without sin that could have thrown the first stone. Indeed, Jesus is the only one who can condemn any of us. But he didn't.

Instead, Jesus simply asked, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No, one sir.” she said. *“Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

How could he do this? How could Jesus just let her walk away? Why wasn't he like the rest of the religious leaders? Why was Jesus so soft on her sin? Didn't her sin matter to Jesus?

Kurt

Her sin mattered to Jesus. This woman deserved to die for what she had done. Jesus also loved her. He loved her so much that he took the punishment she deserved so she could walk away. It is not that her sin wasn't serious. It is that his love for her was so great he was willing to take the punishment she deserved.

Jesus wasn't like the Scribes and Pharisees and many religious teachers today. **He didn't come to condemn us. He came to forgive us.**

Today it is easy to be just like the Scribes and Pharisees when we see sin in people's lives. It is easy to be quick to condemn, berate and humiliate. It is easy to see the sin in others clearly, while we turn a blind eye to the sin in ourselves.

Jesus was not like the Pharisees. **He didn't come to condemn us. He came to forgive us.** He calls us to do the same. Rather than condemning people in sin, point them to Jesus who loves them so much he died for their sin.

Maybe this morning you can relate to the woman caught in adultery. You are filled with shame because of sin about which you don't want anyone else to know. You wonder what Jesus feels about you. Your sin does matter. It is serious. But Jesus loves you more than you can imagine. Jesus died for your sin so this morning, just like this woman, you can walk away and leave your sin behind. **He didn't come to condemn us. He came to forgive us.**

If you are buried with guilt and shame, run to the arms of Jesus. He loves you so much more than you can imagine. Jesus has a word for you from this true story. "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and sin no more." Let's pray.

Conclusion

Jordan — Jesus, some of us this morning can relate to the Pharisees and the Scribes. We are quick to see sin in everyone's life but our own. For that we want to ask your forgiveness. Help us to be more compassionate and less judgmental. Help us to be more like Jesus when we see sin.

Kurt — Jesus, some of us this morning can relate to the woman caught in adultery. We have really blown it. Some of us have sinned in big way, or we sin the same way repeatedly. We wondered how you felt about us as we sit here filled with shame. Thank you for letting us know from this woman's story that you love us more than we can imagine. You died to take away our sin. **You didn't come to condemn us but to forgive us.**



Jordan Gowing and Dr. Kurt Trucksess worked together on this sermon.

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