

October 28, 2012 - Jesus and the Woman

We are right in the middle of a series in the Gospel of John. As we've been going through we've been looking at all these different encounters where Jesus runs into all sorts of different types of people and we've been watching, seeing how Jesus deals with those people and trying to glean something from that as to what we can expect from Jesus and how he deals with us and what we can trust from Jesus in how he will deal with us. We've been trying our best to put ourselves in the place of the people in those various stories. We are going to continue along that line this morning.

Before we get into that, though, if you've got your orange bookmark from last week, what we're doing is, each week we're going to add to your list there and we're going to give you a short phrase that will kind of summarize each chapter in the Gospel of John. What we are hoping that this will do is, by the time you get to the end, you will have a bookmark that you can stick in your Bible but even better, if we repeat it enough times, it kind of gets stuck in your brain so that you know where some of these things are. Very quickly and I don't want to spend a lot of time but if you remember from last week, please just say them out as we come to them. Chapter 1 - Word became flesh; Chapter 2 - Water into Wine, and for those of you who are over-achievers you could put, Clearing the Temple, as well; Chapter 3 - Nick at Night, this is where Jesus talks to Nicodemus and talks about being 'born again'; Chapter 4 - Woman at the Well, Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman, talks about living water; Chapter 5 - Bubble Bath, the lame man beside the pool waiting for the water to bubble so he could get in and be healed and Jesus came along and said "I have a better idea, get up take your mat and walk; Chapter 6 - Two things; Feeding the 5,000 and Walking on Water; Chapter 7 - Teaching at the Temple, there's a whole long section of Jesus at the Temple teaching different things; Chapter 8 - Sand Scribbling. Which is going to be the text that we are going to look at this morning.

Alright, so we're in John, Chapter 8, Devon read the story for us this morning. I couldn't help but thinking as I was looking at that story and thinking about it recently, the thing that came to my mind was.....fishing. Now you may think that's kind of a weird connection, how do you make that leap Mike? But let me explain it to you this way. Here's what I think about fishing. I love going fishing. I enjoy being out in the boat and just relaxing on the water and you have these kind of long peaceful moments interrupted by these frantic moments of adrenaline when you actually catch something. So I just really enjoy the experience of fishing. If you've never been fishing, let me explain the process that happens when you go fishing. When you go fishing you start out and you need some kind of bait. Maybe you get live bait like a worm or something that you stick on a hook or maybe you just get a lure of some kind. You need some kind of bait and on the bait there's a hook and so what you do is you throw that hook out into the water where you think there will be a fish. And then you wait for the fish to show up. Sometimes you wait a little while and sometimes you wait a long, long time. You wait for the fish to show up and when it does it sees the lure and sees the bait and it looks like it's something good to eat and so the fish bites on the lure.

What you're supposed to do, they tell you, is when you feel the fish first bite on the lure, you're supposed to give your line a big jerk to set the hook in its mouth so that it doesn't lose the hook. The next thing you do is you've got to go through this process of reeling in the fish. When you're reeling in the fish, basically what you're doing is you're dragging the fish through the water towards your boat. The fish, when it's being dragged through the water, it will jump and it will pull and it will tug and it will try and get away from wherever it's getting pulled to. It doesn't know where it's going but it's pretty sure it doesn't want to be there. So as you're dragging it through the water it will pull and it will fight. Eventually you get the fish into the boat and the fish is laying there on the bottom of the boat and it's gasping for water a little bit and it's kind of flopping around and eventually it's a little bit exhausted and it just kind of lays there. At that moment, the fish's life is in the fisherman's hand. It's all up to the fisherman whether the fish is going to get released back into the water and swim away merrily or...is going to be a fish fry for supper. All of that is determined by the fisherman and it's fate is in the fisherman's hand. Well, that whole process reminds me of our story in John, Chapter 8. Because as I read John, Chapter 8, I can't help but feel that the Pharisees were on a fishing expedition. Now let me just recount this story and see if you see the parallels to what was going on in that story. We started out with fate, there was something that was going to lure this woman to that place, that night. I don't know what it was, we don't know the circumstance that brought the woman and the man to that place that evening, why they decided to rendezvous there but there was something that lured them into that spot. The Pharisees were there and they were waiting. John actually tells us that this woman was 'caught in the act' which means they didn't just happen to hear about it, it wasn't just a rumour that came down the grape vine. They were there and they caught her in the act. More than that, the law states that for a charge like this you need two or three witnesses to observe it. These guys were there and they were waiting for the strike. As soon as the man and woman got together and they committed this sin together, the Pharisees jumped out and they jerked her out of bed and they jerked her out of the room then they dragged her through the streets of Jerusalem in the early morning. As they were dragging her through the streets I'm sure she was kicking and screaming and fighting and trying to break free and get away. Eventually they get her to the Temple Courts and they throw her down on the ground in the middle of the Temple Courts and she's tossed at the feet of this Rabi. She looks around and she is surrounded by all of these angry men. I'm sure she was out of breath and exhausted and collapsed in the dirt. Trying to hastily wrap the sheet that she had brought with her around her exposed body. If she was able to hang on to the sheet as she was being dragged through the streets. At that moment her fate was in the carpenter's hands. It was all up to him whether she would be released and be able to go free and go back to her home, or whether she would be sentenced to death. As you watch the Pharisee's on this fishing expedition with this poor woman, you have to wonder what was their motivation here? It seems fairly clear to me that the Pharisees did not care in the least about this woman. If they had really cared about this woman they would have pre-emptively the night before, instead of just hiding in the shadows to catch her in the act. They didn't care about the shame and humiliation they were bringing on this poor woman. They didn't care about the stigma that was going to stay with her for years and years to come. They didn't care about the emotional

assault that was going to leave scars on her that may never go away. They clearly did not care if this woman ended up being stoned and dying. But even more interesting, they didn't care if she got off the hook either. They didn't care anything about this woman at all.

When I was in college, I remember driving home one time. I think it was at the end of the school year, but I can't remember for sure. It was near this place called Aberdeen in South Dakota, not Jonathan's Aberdeen. I was driving along on a road, it was a nice road had two lanes, shoulders, was divided. Nice big ditch between the road coming along the other side. I was just, I don't know what I was thinking about but I was just kind of cruising along. Before I knew it I looked in my mirror and saw a police car. It wasn't quite like that, I saw him driving down the other side and as he passed me I looked at my speedometer and sure enough I looked in my mirror and I saw his lights come on and I watched him as he went back and turned around and came. When he finally caught up with me I pulled over to the side of the road. He came up to me and I rolled down my window and he said "Do you know what the speed limit is here?" And I lied and said "No". And he said "It's 55". And I said "Oh wow! In Canada if I was driving on a road like this it would be at least 60 or 65 or maybe even 70.

He said "Where are you coming from?" I said "Bible College". So we talked for a little while and he went back to his car. He came back and he handed me this little piece of paper and he said "Son, I'm going to give you a warning for the speeding." And I said "Oh, well thank you very much officer." And he handed me this paper and it was a fine. I said "What is this for?" And he said "Well, you have that little tassel hanging in your rear-view mirror and I'm giving you a fine for 'obstruction of vision'." Now I don't know if there is any such law in South Dakota for obstruction of vision and I'm pretty sure my little grad tassel did not qualify for that but I'm sure if there was a law it's not enforced regularly, but he knew that I wasn't going to come back to South Dakota in two weeks and protest my ticket and I was just going to pay the fine and since my fine for my 'obstruction of vision ticket' was half of what my speeding ticket would have been, I said "Thank you sir" and drove along on my way.

Now, there's a reason why I tell you that story. You see, you may think that the Pharisee's that the reason they didn't care about the woman was because their desire to uphold the law overrode their care for the woman. Maybe their desire for the law their passion for the law was so strong that that's why they were willing to treat this woman so poorly. But the truth is, if they had really cared about the law, they would have bothered to get it right, which they didn't. You see, according to the law, both the man and the woman were supposed to be punished. And John clearly states "only one of them was there" and we already know that there were at least two or three people witnessing the act, so there was no reason why they couldn't have brought the man if they wanted to, but that was not their purpose. They tell Jesus, they say "Moses law says that she must be put to death or that she must be stoned. Which wasn't exactly true because Moses' law states that both the man and the woman should be put to death but it doesn't specify that she must be stoned. So there were options for much more discreet and humane ways to carry out this sentence if they had wanted to. But probably the most telling thing about this story is, some scholars will say that this

particular law hadn't been enforced for hundreds of years. Now, I can guarantee you one thing, for sure, it hadn't been enforced for at least 90 years or more, because 90 years or more, is how long the Romans had been in Israel. Once the Romans took over Israel they said "No one gets to execute anyone, except us." Which is why in the end, you remember, that the Jews took Jesus to Pilate to get his execution order signed because they were not allowed to do it themselves. And that's what makes this such a cunning trap. John himself notes that this was all a big set-up. This was all just a trap from the outset. Because, you see this is what happens. If Jesus said "Go ahead and stone her" he would lose popularity among those who saw him as a gracious and compassionate and forgiving teacher. But more than that, he would be breaking the Roman law and could be brought up on charges and arrested or worse. On the other hand, if he says "let her go" he's now breaking the Rabbinic law and the Law of Moses and he would lose popularity among the people and he could be brought in front of the Sanhedren and charged there. You see, the only safe answer for Jesus in this situation was to not answer at all and that's what he does. And Jesus bends down and writes in the sand.

I appreciate your answers up here on the board and thanks to Roy for prompting you to get a few more out of you. This spring we were in Ireland and we went to this one place called New Grange and it was a place where there were three tombs. There was the tomb and then they built a whole pile of dirt over top of it so it just looked like a giant hill. Then you would go into the tomb. Out in front of the tomb there were several big stones and right in front of the tomb there was a stone like this (had etchings in circles?? On the front). I don't know if you can see the carvings on the front of the stones. Our guide told us that some people will say that this was a map and so these circles represent the three big hills that are the tombs and these square shapes out front, those are some smaller grave areas and then these kind of squiggles on the bottom, that represents the river that runs nearby. But before she told us all that she asked us "What do you guys think these carvings mean?" And a couple people offered their suggestions and she said "You know what? Your guess is as good as mine, because no one has any idea what these squiggles mean." The reason I tell you that is because the same is true for when Jesus wrote on the sand. There's lots of people who will speculate and who will guess about what it was that Jesus wrote on the sand and no one really knows. So your suggestions up here on the board, even the elephant, those are as good as anyone else's guesses as to what Jesus actually wrote on the sand. No one knows what he wrote, but I have an idea of why he maybe wrote in the sand that day. I don't think it's because he was intimidated and he was trying to collect his thoughts. I don't think he was stalling for time and was looking for an answer. Here's what I think perhaps, maybe the reason he was writing. He went over and he knelt down and he wrote like this on the ground. Now, when I did that, I tried to watch you at the same time. But when I did that, what did you do? You watched. Some of you leaned forward a little bit, some of you leaned around someone a bit. I just can't help but wonder if the reason that Jesus knelt down on the ground and wrote in the dirt, was to give everyone else something to look at besides the woman. Can you imagine, this may have been the only thing that could have drawn people's eyes away from the woman who was cowering on the concrete. Can you imagine,

if you had been that woman, how precious those few moments of being out of the spotlight must have been. Now, that only works for awhile because the Pharisees persist and they say John 8, Verse 7: “They kept demanding an answer so he stood up again and said “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone.” And then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. Now, we know the story, we know what happened next and we know by doing this, Jesus has just signed her release papers. I imagine to this woman as she was there with her knees bleeding and her heart pounding and her head spinning, all that she heard Jesus say was “All right, throw the first stone.” Now, if you would, just close your eyes for a few moments and imagine that if you were that woman in that moment, you are trapped, nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide. You curl up on the ground trying to hide as much of your nakedness and shame as much as possible. You put your hands over your head in the vain hope of protecting yourself from the eminent attack. You close your eyes and wait for the onslaught of stones that will soon shatter your bones and pierce your flesh. You lay there never knowing when the next stone will hit or how many stones are still to come. Close your eyes and imagine being that woman in that moment. Don’t know how that felt for you. Did it feel like you closed your eyes for a long time? It was just a few seconds over a minute and I’m sure on that day it lasted a lot longer than one minute as the Pharisees around her, oldest first, started dropping their stones and started walking away. And eventually after I’m sure it was a long pause to make sure that no one else was coming, the woman looked around to make sure that there was no one there. There was no one in sight except the disciples who were watching at some distance with dumbfounded looks on their faces and of course, Jesus, who was still there, drawing in the sand. And again, we know how the story ends so we breath a sigh of relief at the point, but not her, she doesn’t know the ending. She may not even know anything about the man who has been assigned to be her judge. Ironically, Jesus is the only man who meets the criteria required to throw that first stone. For all she knows, he just might still do it. So she starts to sit up slowly and wrap the sheet around her quivering body. Something about this motion catches Jesus’ attention. He looks around and sees that all the accusers have ducked away. So he tells her three things that will change her entire life. Jesus straightened up and asked her “Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one Sir” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

Jesus tells her three things. The first thing he says is “Has no one condemned you?” Has no one condemned you. They have all left because they have all sinned just like you have. They are all just as guilty as you are. They have all messed up just as bad as you have. They may have done it in different ways perhaps. They may have been tripped up by different sins, but they have fallen nonetheless. And there is something powerfully reassuring in knowing that you are not alone. Much of the trap’s strength is built on this lie. You are the only one. You are the only one who surfs to those adult only web sites late at night. You are the only one who doesn’t control their temper. You are the only one who has a marriage that is strained. You are the only one who cheats on their tests at school or on their taxes. You are the only one who indulges those lustful thoughts. You are the only one who is financially desperate. You’re the only one who lies to get themselves out of trouble.

You're the only one who carries a grudge. The trap says 'you are the only one.' And if anyone else ever find out they would reach for their stoning rock. But the truth is, you are not the only one. You are not even one of a few. Paul writes in Romans 3:22-24 and says: "This righteousness is from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus."

Do me a favour if you would. If you were born in September or October, would you just stand up for a second. You don't have to do anything but stand. That is a relatively good cross-section of our congregation. Look at these people, right? Now I'm going to tell you something. There is no difference between them. They are all sinners just like the rest of us who are still sitting down. There's no difference they've all sinned and Jesus' grace redeems each and every one of them. Which brings us to Jesus' second statement.

After she says that no one has condemned her, then Jesus says "Then neither will I condemn you." If no one else has grounds to condemn you and the one who stands in a position to judge you, offers forgiveness.

Reminds me of a story I came across recently of a woman who claimed she saw Jesus every night and she told her minister "I see Jesus every night before I go to sleep." And the minister was a little sceptical and so he said "Tell you what. When I was a young boy, teenager in college, I committed a terrible sin. So tonight I want you to ask Jesus what that was and if you come back with the answer, then I will know that what you are saying is true." And so she said fine and she came back the next day. The Minister said "Did you see Jesus last night?" and she said "Yes". "Did you ask Him about my sin?" And she said "Yes". "What did he say?" "He said he doesn't remember." That's how Jesus regards us.

Jeremiah writes in Chapter 31, Verse 34. "There's a time when no longer will man have to teach his brother or his neighbour saying 'Know the Lord' because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest" declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more." Whatever your past, your struggles, your addictions, your habits, your spiritual Achilles heel, whatever it is, God promises to forgive all those who seek Him."

Which brings us to the final point. Jesus says "Has no one condemned you?" The second message is "Neither do I" and his last message to the woman is "Now go and leave your life of sin."

One author puts it this way. "The reason he said this was not because he was trying to shore up the Law or protect the system, but it was because he didn't want the woman to break herself. People are not made for promiscuous sex and to use ourselves that way is as destructive as abusing a Stradivarius Violin to drive in tent pegs." Now, sexual sin gets our attention a lot more than some other things but all sin is equally destructive. All sin is a trap

and it doesn't matter if it's greed or it's lust or if it's prejudice or if it's arrogance, or anger, or bitterness or jealousy or dishonesty or whatever else it is. Sin is a trap and it is destructive and Jesus tells this woman "I've freed you from the trap, now don't walk back into it. I'm working on healing those wounds, now don't give yourself new ones. I'm going to work on repairing the damage, but don't destroy yourself any further."

Paul writes to the Church in Galatia Gal. 5:1 and says: "It's for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and don't let yourself be burdened again by the yoke of slavery." You have been sprung from the trap, don't walk back into it. That seems fairly obvious to us. Why would anyone do that? Why would anyone who has been released from a trap walk right back into it? That doesn't make any sense, does it? But we do it, don't we? And if it's not the same trap, sometimes we walk into a new one. Sometimes the new trap is the memory of the old trap we've been released from. We've been freed and forgiven but we still carry the guilt and the grudges. We still carry the burden and the baggage. We still carry the humiliation and the heartache. But Jesus wants to free us from these things just as much as he wants to free us from the trap that created them in the first place.

Now, ironically, the Pharisees who seemed to care nothing at all for this woman, did the best thing possible, the best thing in the World that anyone could have done for her. They brought her to the feet of Jesus and that's the best place for you to be. The best place for me to be as well. You see whatever sin has entangled you. Whatever (sorry Mike, tape ended.)