

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Is 43:16-21, Ps 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6, Phil 3:8-14, Jn 8:1-11

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They wanted to trap Jesus . . . to set a question he could not answer . . . to negate his integrity . . . to then have an excuse not to listen to the challenge of his message . . . and so a “sinner” is exploited . . . a woman is made to stand alone, to be publicly shamed by those who were the “law abiding ones” . . . a scene which is not far from experiences in our world today.

Jesus was teaching when the scribes and Pharisees set about to “trap” him. And what a perfect trap they had devised. . .

a sinner. . .

a woman . . .

a public display . . .

a black and white situations which would force Jesus to say . . .

Be compassionate – thus declaring himself to side with lawbreakers . . .or

Follow the law – thus declaring his message of love and forgiveness to be fake.

A perfect test case; there was no way this trap could fail to discredit Jesus. The outcome they sought, to show Jesus to be false and unworthy to be a teacher, was surely within their grasp. Can't we just imagine the expressions on their faces . . . Smug? Mocking? Laughing at the prize that was soon to be theirs? Disregard, disdain for the sinner, the woman who was to be sacrificed so they could have their way?

With a bit of strong interior honesty, can I find myself among their group? Can I remember times that my gain in an argument, or discussion, would come at the suffering of another or the humiliation of another? When I listen to much of the uncivil discourse of the political arena of our times, I wonder if we have a modern day example of just this scene.

Then the surprise . . .calmly bending down to connect with the dust at his feet, Jesus jots something, I always wonder what this doodling was . . . And when pressed again, he turns the tables on the accusers . . . if you have never broken the law, if you could be brought into the center of this circle of entrapment, if you could be subject to the humiliation you have brought to another, then go ahead and declare yourself to be above the human journey, to be without any brokenness or darkness . . . then, continue to make yourself the angry judge of another's unworthiness!

And wisely, at last, these accusers recognized they were just as much deserving of condemnation as was their victim. To declare themselves otherwise was obviously untrue, even to the simplest of the people who were standing about. To hold to their claim of purity and power over, would be a position which would not only be profoundly false – it would turn them into persons lacking in any integrity . . . and then what would those, who were gathered with Jesus listening to his teaching, think of them? Even if honesty did not require them to walk away, at least saving face among the people did.

Do you ever wonder where the story went from there? I know I do! Did they just go away to re-
g5oup and plan another trap? Possibly . . . Did some of them realize what had just happened
and maybe lingered long enough to hear Jesus tell the woman she was not condemned? And did
they maybe hope that this could be true for themselves as well???

We do not know anymore of this event, but we do know that Jesus response to the woman let her
be free – free to live in a new way, free to see herself and her relationship to God in a new way.
No shame, no condemnation, no isolation from the community – only the possibility of a new
path, a more life-giving path. The promise of Isaiah that there would be . . . water in [her] desert
and rivers in [her] wasteland, for [her, a chosen one] to drink . . . that [she] who God formed for
himself, might announce God’s praise!

Such a message of hope and possibility! Could this not be a very important message we need to
hear in our world today – a world so torn by lack of civility, by violence – violence of both
actions and words - so full of anger and conflict and efforts to pull others down!

What if instead of trying to trap others, we set our hearts to listen? What is instead of using
others as victims of judgment, we treasured the dignity of each person? What if instead of
condemnation, we offered hope for a new way? Maybe then, God’s promise given through Isaiah
could become a powerful reality experienced each day: See, I am doing something new! Now it
springs forth, do you not perceive it? Then with the psalmist we could add our voice to the
prayer of praise: The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy. During the ending
days of lent, may we strive to make it so!