

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## *The Humanizing Power of Forgiveness*

## Gospel Lesson

John 8:2-11 (NRSVUE)

<sup>2</sup>Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup>She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."]]

## Bible/Sermon Focus

No one is above sin and everyone is in need of forgiveness. As Christians, we know this. We know that we are sinners. We know that we are in need of forgiveness. We all know this. So, why is it that certain people seem to be the target for judgement and for violence more than others? Why do some people get the benefit of the doubt and receive more compassion than others? Why are certain people more easily forgiven than others?

Our sermon for this week is aptly titled, "The Humanizing Power of Forgiveness." We are going to consider why some people are given more compassion, and some are not. Why do we see some people as *more human* or *less human*. In other words, why do we dehumanize certain people?

In the past two weeks we have seen on the news, again, more stories that raise questions about why police shot an unarmed black man multiple times, but were able to take a white man responsible for a mass shooting safely into custody without a bullet being fired. We have seen, again, the responsibility of a pregnancy being placed solely on female bodies with no legislation placing responsibilities onto the male bodies who impregnated them. And still, statistically, transgender people are four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of violent crime. Why is it that certain bodies have been dehumanized, and therefore are more likely to experience violence and subjection?

Trans activist, Alok, when asked about their sense of fashion, said, "When we go to the club everyone says, 'Oh my god I love your outfit.' But no one is going to ask us, 'How are you getting home?' They don't care because I think trans-feminine people only matter when we're fabulous. The very core of misogyny against trans people, or *trans misogyny*, is that we're always masquerading as something we're not. That we just put on this dress to trick someone. So, we are always seen as worthy of our violence."

This phrase, “worthy of our violence,” has been playing over and over in my head this week as I’ve been considering our story from the Gospel of John. I cannot seem to shake the image of Alok, this activist, somehow sitting interchangeably with the woman caught in adultery. Only that Alok didn’t “break the law.” Alok’s existence is enough to warrant violence against their body, at least in our culture.

As Pastor Andy pointed out, it was just as illegal for the man caught in adultery as it was for the woman, yet we never hear of him being drug out in front of a crowd to be punished. We don’t even hear him mentioned by the crowd. No one stopped to ask, “Why her? Why not him?” Why does this one get to be *more human* and less worthy of violence? Why doesn’t this one?

It also needs to be noted that this story takes place in the temple. This is a story taking place within the religious setting, with the religious leaders bringing the woman forward. Too often the church has been complicit if not the main perpetrator of judgment and violence against already oppressed bodies. Rev. Dr. Allen Dwight Callahan reminds us, “In every age, hypocrisy is but a stone’s throw away from religious zeal.” We have a choice, church. We can choose to judge and harm people, or we can choose to forgive and act with compassion. We can choose the way of Christ and really try to see someone for what they are, a beloved child of God.

And when we make the right choice to love our neighbors that will mean we will have to know our neighbors and to do the work of dismantling the judgments we have been taught to hold. We will have to name when we find ourselves objectifying others. And we will have to confess that we are guilty of judgment and objectification. And then we have to ask forgiveness for ourselves. We will have to be willing to see all people, as people.

## Discussion Questions

1. How would you define religious zeal?
2. How good are you at “not sinning again?”
3. Reflect on this quote from Rev. Dr. Gail O’Day “When the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman who had been caught in adultery to Jesus, they dehumanized her, turning her into an object for debate and discussion.” When have you been the object for someone’s debate and discussion? When have you been the one objectified? What was that experience like?
4. Why and how does forgiveness humanize us to each other?
5. Why do you think that the man who was also caught in adultery was not objectified by the religious leaders like the woman?

## Prayer

God of Forgiveness, we pray for pardon for the times we have thrown stones at each other, especially when they were at easy targets. May we be forgiven for trying to control, dehumanize, and objectify bodies, especially those we’ve historically deemed more worthy of violence. **Amen.**

*“In every age, hypocrisy is but a stone’s throw away from religious zeal.” - Rev. Dr. Allen Dwight Callahan*