

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

5th Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, April 3, 2022

The Love that Casts Out Fear

Written by Douglas Sousa

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11



In Jesus, we do not find condemnation but restoration and healing.

The fullness of the love and mercy which Jesus came to bring is on display in this [Sunday's gospel reading](#). A woman who had been caught in adultery is dragged before Jesus. The penalty for her sin is that she be stoned to death. We can only imagine the shame and fear she felt. However, while the crowd stands in judgment over her, Jesus takes another posture. He stoops down. He brings himself down to her level. He refuses to stand in judgment of her. It was not to condemn sinners that Jesus came, but to bring them the Father's love and mercy. And so, he scatters the crowd with his famous words, "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone."

It is interesting that the gospel begins by telling us that Jesus had just spent the night praying on the Mount of Olives. If the name sounds familiar, it is because it is the same place where Jesus will experience his agony in the garden. As Jesus sees the woman dragged to him, he probably cannot help but think that soon this same crowd would be dragging him to judgment before Pontius Pilate. He probably cannot help but think that soon he will be made to stand beaten and humiliated before this same crowd as they shout out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Jesus knows all too well how bloodthirsty a crowd can

be. He refuses to condemn the adulterous woman, no matter how grave her sin. Instead, he offers to die in her place by accepting the tortures of the cross. She can walk away free because he has taken upon himself the punishment for her sin.

We can very often feel shame and guilt like the adulterous woman. However, the crowd that condemns us is not always other people who have dragged us out and pointed fingers at us. Rather, the crowd is most often voices within us that criticize and accuse us. They are messages we have internalized over the years from parents, teachers, and our peers. Those voices tell us that we are not good enough, that we can never be truly holy because of the sins of our past. They tell us that we do not deserve to be forgiven and do not deserve to be loved. They tell us that we are so broken that not even God can fix us. Those voices try to isolate us from God and convince us that we can never have the joy, peace, and freedom He promises to those who love Him.

When the voices of the crowd and the stones of their condemnation are bearing down on us, we need to fly to Jesus. He alone can dispel all those negative messages and replace them with the Good News of God's love and forgiveness. When we have sinned, it is not the time for us to avoid Jesus but to run to him and beg for his mercy. We can count on him to take our shame away and give us his peace, to take away our guilt and replace it with his joy, and to take away our despair and give us the hope that can only be found in him. We need not fear because he has taken on himself the punishment which we deserve. The one who gave his life to save us will spare nothing in order to restore our friendship with him. We can count on him to treat us with kindness and mercy no matter how shameful our sins may be.

Douglas Sousa

PRAYER

Loving Father,
You promise mercy and love
To all those who turn trustingly to You.
When we are tempted to pick up stones
Remind us of how much You have forgiven us.
When we hear the condemnation of the crowd,
Give us confidence that You are near.
When we feel the pressure of the world's
expectations,
Fill us with the desire to please You alone.
Use us to show Your mercy to all those
Who are burdened with shame and guilt.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.