

2013: TIME TO CHOOSE

**February 3 (Superbowl): Justice: Love Serving Only the Other** (John 8:1-12);

Intro: We learn in Chapter 7 of John that this is the season for the Feast of Tabernacles when the Jews re-enacted the wondering in the wilderness. They came by the thousands to Jerusalem to live in tents and to feast together. It was during this feast so popular among the Hebrews that Solomon dedicated the Temple a thousand years earlier.

The feast ended, and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Perhaps he stayed with Lazarus. The next day, the day after the big feast was over, Jesus appeared again in the Temple courts. Many people remain in Jerusalem even after the feast just as they do in New Orleans after Mardi Gras.

Any large gathering is an opportune time for sin in the big city. Jesus urges this woman to “leave her life of sin” (v11). This was not a single error but a pattern of her life.

They brought her to Jesus as if he is the judge over them. While this is a test by the Pharisees, and an attempt to trap him, it is also a concession to his status among the people. They call him “master” here. Yesterday they called him a deceiver (John 7:12, 47).

They asked the question, “What would Jesus do?” Now that is a good question. They ask it, though, not to find out what they should do but to trap him in his words. They have no desire to learn from the teacher. They want to take him by force and eliminate him.

These accusers supposed that they had Jesus in an impossible position. If he acquitted the woman, he was guilty of breaking the law of Moses. If he released her, he was guilty of a lack of mercy and love, his principle subjects in teaching and preaching.

Jesus did not at first reply to his enemies. He wrote in the sand. We do not know what. They kept questioning him, perhaps supposing that they had him in a box canyon now and he could not avoid getting into trouble.

When he did reply, Jesus used the principle of justice. “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (v7). They came to accuse Jesus, but now they are required to look into their own hearts. They themselves are the accused. He has not excused the woman with this comment. Rather, he asks if anyone in the crowd is fit to be the prosecutor and executioner.

Jesus did not come to condemn the world, or this woman, but to save the world and her.

He wrote a second time on the ground after he gave his invitation to those without sin. We do not know what he wrote in either case. Maybe the

writing itself frightened the accusers of this woman. Perhaps they left one by one because they knew what he might have written about them.

The oldest accusers left first, silently retreating from Christ and the woman. One by one they slunk away from the scene they had created, ashamed of their own moral failure and unwilling to presume any longer to judge this woman caught in the very act.

Jesus is without sin. He may cast the first stone at this woman. He is infinitely holy and just. And she remains before him, though she might have escaped as did her accusers. I think she wants to know his verdict. She remains before Jesus because she finds him to be not only holy and just but also full of truth and mercy.

Jesus asked her two questions. Concerning the whereabouts of her accusers, the woman has nothing to say. She does not attack them or accuse them. She is penitent before Christ. Concerning the question “Has no one condemned you?” she replied, “No one, sir.” She speaks with respect and deference to Jesus.

Jesus said that he would not condemn her either. Jesus is forgiving her, I think. He has power on earth to forgive sins.

He tells her to “go and sin no more.” He is urging her to abandon her sinful life.

Justice is the virtue that deals with these dimensions of your life:

I. The Crowded Planet: *all the people gathered around him* (John 8:2).

II. The Distant Person: *The Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group* (John 8:4).

III. The Principalities and Powers: *We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities (arche), against powers (exousia), against the rulers (take hold of cosmos) of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* (Ephesians 6:12).

A. The structures that rule the world of Judea and Jerusalem are evident in this story.

1. The religious authorities are the *exousia*. They are trapped in a cycle of injustice that is barricaded by and justified by their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. They treat WOMEN with disdain. It is written into their laws. It is how they know society and how they inherited it.

2. The political authorities are held captive by expediency and by violent men in high places. This chafes on the religious authorities every day. They know the contest of wills in this matter of governance and

authority.

3. The “prince of this world” is the devil. Evil is pervasive from east to west and north to south. Every human organization, agency, corporation, and construct is crippled by sin.

B. Similar political and economic structures rule our world, and they are broken and sinful.

1. We confess this about our individual souls when we say, “Well, nobody is perfect.”

2. We can also say this about our collective expressions whatever and wherever they may be: “No human construct is perfect.” In fact, all are fallen, some farther than others.

C. Justice is the virtue that motivates us to challenge the structures that grind up ordinary people, that cause them harm.

1. We work for justice in our families so that people are treated fairly and with dignity.

2. We work for justice in our institutions: educational, medical, corporate, religious and political.

IV. The Jesus Principle: *Now what do you say?* (John 8:5).

A. Jesus lived a perfect and just life. Pilate said of him, “I find no basis for a charge against him” (John 19:4).

1. He kept the law of God perfectly. He was righteous in all his ways.

2. He challenged the injustice around him. The religious authorities put great burdens on the people.