

Monday, August 10, 2020

The God of second chances.

- Pastor Hank French

Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:10-11).

There is a great story in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John. One day a group of angry men, dragging a disheveled and frightened woman, approached Jesus. They claimed that the woman had been caught engaging in adultery. Bristling with self-righteousness, they said to Jesus, "In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

The text tells us that they said this to "test" him. They had heard that Jesus was a compassionate, merciful man and they were hoping he would try to protect the woman from being stoned to death so they could charge him with not standing up for the law of Moses which would be a serious offense.

Jesus said nothing. He just stared at them for a moment and then bent over and wrote something in the dirt with his finger. The text doesn't tell us what he wrote, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if he wrote, "So, where's the man?"

While he was bent over writing in the dirt, these holier-than-thou men kept questioning him. Finally Jesus stood up, stared at the men for a moment, and then said, "OK, go ahead and stone her, but let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And then he bent over again and wrote again in the dirt with his finger.

Again, the text doesn't tell us what he wrote, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if this time he wrote, "Gotcha!" (Just kidding.) When he looked up, they were gone. There was only a pile of stones and the woman standing there alone.

Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again." That is, "You are forgiven, go now and start making better choices, choices that are good for you and good for others."

That's the way God is with us. The person who wrote Psalm 103 put it this way, "As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us." Or as the writer of the 1st letter of John put it, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Which is to say God is a God of second chances. Why? Because God is interested in the wellbeing of all. As the writer of 2 Peter put it, God is patient with us, "not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."

This is "good news," this is the Gospel, this is grace—the gift of second chances to get it right.

Prayer: Thank you for your compassion, mercy and forgiveness and the second chances that free us to make better choices. Amen.