

Advent Devotional December 11, 2024

Weekly theme: Peace

Scripture

John 7:53-8:11

53 Then each of them went home, 1 while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 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. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 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. 7 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." 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 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. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Devotion

The Rev. Mikayla Kovacik-Doepker '19

Today's lectionary reading, thought to be a later addition and not included in the oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of John, is part of an ongoing narrative of opposition between Jesus and the legal experts and Pharisees. In an attempt to bring an accusation against Jesus, they presented a woman who was accused of adultery and raised the question of what should be done to punish her. The woman was undoubtedly faced with humiliation, shame, and fear as the judgmental eyes of the men in the temple looked on her. Perhaps the woman expected Jesus to condemn her or even to cast the first stone. Instead, Jesus bent over and wrote something on the ground. When they continued to hound him with questions, he bent over again and wrote on the ground. What exactly he wrote we don't know, but we do know that one by one those who heard him went away. Jesus does not condemn the woman, but instead sends her out with words of blessing, "Go . . . don't sin anymore." Jesus takes what is meant to be a text of terror and turns it into a story of liberation for this woman. The elders, legal experts, and Pharisees were so limited by their own social constructs, binary thought processes, and clumsy theological imaginations that they missed a miracle of mercy. In place of condemnation or death, Jesus offers mercy, a new beginning, and abundant life.

During the season of advent, as we seek to prepare our hearts and minds to, once again, welcome the Christ child, we are reminded that we, too, have our own experiences of terror, shame, and sin. Still, we must acknowledge that we have been participants in others' stories of shame and humiliation. The good news for us all is that the same God who turned the woman's story in this text from terror to liberation is the God who has come for us. Christ comes with mercy, freeing us from sin and shame. Christ comes with mercy, freeing us to new beginnings and abundant life. Christ comes with mercy, turning our stories of shame, humiliation, and terror into stories of peace, hope, joy, and love. As we journey through this advent season, may God's mercy extended to us in the Christ child bring us peace for our living.

Prayer

God of mercy, thank you for your grace that transforms our stories of sin, shame, and terror. We seek Your forgiveness for the times that we have allowed our own social constructs, binary thought processes, or clumsy theological imaginations to blind us to miracles of mercy. During this season of preparation, ready us to be witnesses to transformation, to mercy, and to peace that passes all understanding. In the name of Christ who comes to us in mercy and peace we pray. Amen.