

Theme: Forgiveness

Series: The Apostles Creed

I BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

It was not a world like our own with homes made of wood, carpeted floors and central heating and air. They did not have plumbing and electricity. It was a time of dirt roads and homes made of mud brick and the wealthy homes made of stone. All of their comforts were primitive and harsh. Shoes were nothing more than a piece of leather strapped to one's feet. The mode of travel was to walk. One's dress was a wool robe over a wool or muslin tunic. The women wore a robe similar to the men. Living in hot mud houses and traveling hot, dusty roads and with the scarcity of water made for an unpleasant society. The average man or woman smelled bad, dressed poorly, teeth missing from their mouths, skin wrinkled by the sun and the harsh life. Can you imagine trying to find beauty in that day?

What was true of their homes and lifestyles, was true of their justice system. Their courts were not modern and clean and filled with advocates for the defense and fair judges. Justice could be bought. Nor was it a time of equal rights. A woman had little rights. A poor woman had no rights. It was a world of power. It was a time of corruption and ego strangely mixed with faith and tenacious belief. It was another world and another time.

Yet, that world is strangely like ours. They had a need to love and be loved. They had a need to work and have meaning. They had to feed themselves, raise their children and bury their dead. But, most of all, they needed forgiveness.

Needing forgiveness is a human condition. All of us know what it means to be guilty. We know what it means to feel unworthy, unacceptable, unclean, someone who is undeserving of love and acceptance. That is why so many live lives of debauchery, thinking that they are marred, so much damaged goods, that they have no choice. I heard one woman's excuse for her immorality, "well I am divorced, I am already ruined, I can't expect to be treated with respect." So she lives with a man. Her religion had told her that she could not be forgiven, that, at best, she was second rate, that she could never be whole again. That is what sick and incomplete religion says. Once one has sinned, a course is set, a pattern is engraved. It is like the Clint Eastwood's character in the movie, *Unforgiven*. A killer marries a religious woman. He makes a change, starts a family, settles on a dirt poor farm, lives an awkward, but honest life. Yet, the theme of the movie is that you can't change the tiger's stripes, once a killer always a killer, he was unforgivable, he was tormented, he was unforgiven.

It is into this hot, dusty, harsh, unjust world that our text plunges us. Yet, it is a world much like ours, harsh moments, dark sins, sudden revelations and scandals. A common woman, a dirty, unkempt, woman was exposed as a sinner, not in a court of law, but in public, in the town square. We know nothing about this woman—her name, her age, her marital status or if she had a family. But you can be sure that she was someone who was expendable, someone who was seen as of little consequence in the eyes of her accusers.

Her accusers were scribes and Pharisees, religious leaders. These gentlemen simply brought to Jesus a clear cut case of adultery and asked him as a rabbi to judge it. The law was very clear on this matter; if a man and woman were caught in adultery, they were to be stoned to death.

They addressed Jesus politely and called him teacher. This woman was caught in the very act, implying that this was an open and shut case. They cite the Law of Moses, the Old Testament Law pointing out that the death penalty is called for. We are told that this was done to test Jesus. The word in the Greek means to put to the test with the view of failing. They were seeking to trap Jesus.

To their dismay Jesus just sit there and began to write in the dirt. They must have thought that they had him. They persisted and kept asking him for an answer. He stood up and gave them an answer, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." And Jesus stooped over and began to write in the dirt again. The verdict was obvious; but, the Bible says that they began to leave, starting with the oldest and Jesus was soon left alone with the woman surrounded by the gathered crowd still watching. Jesus had seen through their plot and held them up to the same standard by which they were judging this woman. You see, they had violated the law when they used her, when they did not warn her, when they did not provide legal counsel for her, and they did not produce the guilty man. Plus not one of them could say that their life was without sin, by the same standard, they too could have been stoned. In that moment of honesty, they saw that they were sinners and that sin is sin.

Jesus turns to the woman, who is guilty and said "where are your accusers, did no one accuse you?" And she said, "no one Lord." Jesus answered "Neither do I condemn you; go your way. From now on sin no more."

Jesus is not going soft on sin. He is not saying its ok, so you committed adultery, big

deal. What he is doing is forgiving her, separating her from her sins. We must understand that Jesus did not come to condemn us but to forgive us. Convicting us of our sin is different from condemning. Condemning is passing judgement and sentence; convicting us of sin is to expose us to the reality of our own sin.

She was a sinner caught in the very act. But she stood before the only person who really matters when it comes to our sin and He did not condemn her. I believe that in this moment of redemptive encounter, even though the words are not expressed in the text, Jesus forgave her of her sin. Forgiveness is the only cure for sin.

We must not fool ourselves, we really stand guilty before God. But, it is not just those who commit the obvious sins, all of us stand before God guilty. All of us! That is the human condition. All of us walk in darkness. But Jesus boldly claimed that He is the light of the world and he who follows Him shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Far from being one who condemns us, He is our light, He shows us the way. And those who are in Christ, have the light of life in them. Forgiveness is more than just being relieved of our guilt, it is being set on the right path with the right goal in sight and the ability to follow it all the way home.

It is a sad truth that many walk through life crippled by the sins of their past. They simply can't escape it. The good news is, God wants to forgive you. God desires to forgive you so much that He became flesh and died for us so that we might be forgiven. Our forgiveness came with a price tag. But the price has been paid, Jesus paid the price.

I don't know what happened to the woman caught in adultery, but I suspect her life was changed forever. I suspect that she became whole. For so long, she had gone the wrong way, now Christ himself set her free and pointed her in the right direction. That's what forgiveness does. God does not want us to languish in our sins but to be free. It pleases God to set us free from our guilt and sin so that we can be free to serve Him.

However, a day will come when Jesus will return as judge. In that day, all sin will be condemned and those who have not come to Christ by faith will hear those horrible words, "Depart from me for I never knew you."

I believe in sin, I believe in true guilt before God because I am a sinner. But I have been saved by grace. I have experienced it. I believe in the forgiveness of sin. I hope you do too.