

**Ash Wednesday '13**  
**John 8 1-11**

*Loving Lord. Help us to be ourselves before you, help us to be ourselves before your truth that we may experience your love afresh. In Jesus name, Amen*

Jesus didn't often do sermons, or even homilies. He set out the truth in action and story and then challenged people to work it out for themselves.

As I re-tell today's story where will you position yourself? I've written it through the eyes of the woman. She lived on the edge of society and she had no voice. But the other protagonists were the professional guardians of the faith -totally lacking in self awareness, and quick to judge. Jesus simply sensitized them to their own hypocrisy.

Where does this story resonate in today's world?

Where does it resonate in today's church?

Of course the day came in the end.

What I remember was the noise.

I was sitting quietly, combing my hair and thinking about food for the next day when in they burst.

I think I had heard them in the street outside. They were angry, but then there were so many angry crowds in those days. I thought they were after one of the turncoats -I knew there were lots of men who were collaborating with the Romans.

Then the door was smashed down and the moment I had always dreaded finally arrived.

You may not know about the Jewish Law -but someone like me -well they didn't always live to a ripe old age.

My heart beat so loudly I was sure they could hear it -and they had to drag me along. My legs didn't seem to work.

I recognized at least three of them. I knew them...how shall I put it.... . intimately. But they couldn't see the hypocrisy. I was just one of *'that sort'* and they were going to have their righteous moment.

Even though I had lived with the possibility of this moment I'd never let myself think about the pain. But now I had to.

Thrown into the dust, in the middle of this raging mob I imagined the first stone hitting me, splitting my skin, spilling my blood, then shattering my bones.

Those stones would continue till.....well I couldn't go further.

They flung me down in front of some Rabbi. I suppose they wanted permission -to be told that they were doing the right thing. Under the Romans stoning was illegal -but I knew they turned a blind eye often enough.

The mob didn't get what they wanted though.

This strange young Rabbi was writing on the ground -he didn't look at them or at me -he just said the strangest thing.

I can remember those words to this day.

He said: "If any one of you is without sin, let him throw the first stone at her."

At first I thought he had given them the go -ahead, and I think I covered my face with my arms.

But nothing happened.

'If anyone of you is without sin.'.....what did he mean? My fear was ebbing away, and instead a tide of red was spreading from my chest, up my neck and invading my face. I knew that before this man, for the first time in my life I saw the truth of the seedy life I was living. To be honest I felt shame, real, mortifying shame. I could put on a proud, carefree face to most people -I was known for being feisty - but this man could see past all that - and I knew that what he saw was weak, and frightened -and , well -a mess.

There were some uncomfortable coughs, and one or two of the older men moved away. That Rabbi....you couldn't fake it in front of him.

My tears began to flow and I sobbed silently. I think I was crying for my life, my lost life -a choking grief and shame fused in my weeping.

“Where are they? Has no-one condemned you?”

I looked up and everyone had left.

Everyone except this Rabbi -I know now his name was Jesus -

He hadn't left... he didn't need to -because **he** was without sin; the only person who had the right to condemn me.

But he didn't.

Somehow I found the courage to lift my face and look at him and - - well, I don't have words to describe what I saw.

He wasn't good looking and anyway I didn't notice .

What it was, was love.

Love for the me that lay buried under the sham my life had become.

Love that really didn't judge me.

Love that accepted me.

I don't think I had ever received looks other than those of lust or disgust or pity.

This was different, and somehow it mended my heart.

‘Neither do I condemn you’ said Jesus. And it sounded like forgiveness. He knew. He knew all that I'd done, all I'd suffered, and he was setting me free from it.

Then he said just one more thing “Go now and sin no more.”

Jesus knew everything about me and he loved me. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say gave me back my life.

Well, I chucked in my old life. I've lived very simply since. Now and then I get together with friends who had met Jesus too. We don't say much about what happened to us -but once in a while we will talk about him. About how it was his love which changed us, and -you may think I'm weird, but we all feel that he is still with us, and helps us live our new life.

The authorities tell us he's dead. I don't know about such things -but it doesn't feel like it.

I talk to him in my mind, and when I wobble and feel worthless and stupid I remember *that look* and grow strong again.

Amen