



SERMON TITLE: "Thaumistic Grace"
SCRIPTURE: John 8:1-11

DATE: February 9, 2020
PASTOR: Jim Thompson

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

Jesus is publicly teaching outside the Temple. We don't know exactly what he was teaching about, but class was about to be interrupted with an unparalleled teaching moment. The religious leaders of Jesus' day storm in, and bring a woman in between Jesus and those he's teaching. This woman had just been caught "in the act of adultery." Imagine her shame.

She has never felt this kind of humiliation and embarrassment. It's terrifying enough to be caught in the act, but to be dragged to church, and shoved on stage, only to be mocked... The weight of this was unbearable. And then she slowly realizes that her shame is just a weapon in the hands of the religious leaders that could lead to her death! The amount of fear and disgrace she was feeling was beyond words.

As for the religious leaders, they thought they had finally tricked Jesus. They ask him, "We know you know that the Law says she should be stoned. So, what should we do?" They knew that Jesus was big on compassion, that he loved the shamed, the unlovable, and the outcasts. But they also knew that he was a Bible-teacher. And so they think they've painted him into a corner.

Jesus stoops down, and starts to draw in the dirt. They continue to interrogate him, "What do you say teacher?" Finally, he slowly stands to his feet, and religious leaders aren't ready for his reply. He says, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone." I can imagine they all exchanged glances that said, "I don't want to think about whether he's right or wrong. Let's just throw rocks at both of them." But one by one, they give up. Jesus' response is the bullseye of wisdom. He doesn't undermine the Law, and he leaves the door wide open for compassion. Eventually, they all leave.

Now, it's just this poor girl before Jesus, and likely before the people Jesus was teaching. He says to her, "Sister, look around. Is there anybody left to condemn you?" Through gratitude and tears, she shakes her head, "No sir." Jesus replies, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more."

And maybe in this story, you feel more like the girl caught in sin. And if you have a dark past, if you've got skeletons in your closet, or if you've abused or been abused when it comes to God's good gift of sex, be reminded that those things in your past don't have to weigh you down or define you. If you come to Jesus, he's not ashamed of your shame. He doesn't reluctantly forgive you. He loves you, wants you to live in freedom. If you're a Christian and this haunts you, Jesus doesn't regret saving you. He's not embarrassed by you. He doesn't love some future version of you; he loves you right now, and he loves loving you.

Or maybe in this story, you feel like the religious leaders. You think your sin isn't as bad as the sin of others. You draw attention to other people's sin so that you can feel better about your own. You deceive yourself into believing that

comparison, rather than Jesus, can take away sin. As churchy people, sometimes we can be judgmental, hypocritical, legalistic, self-righteous, and look down at others whose sin is more public. But when Jesus says, "If anyone among you doesn't have sin, you can throw the first rock," he's saying that we're all the woman caught in adultery. We all need the grace and compassion that Jesus is extending to her. And if we have received it, how backwards and inconsistent is it if we don't extend that same grace to others? Simply put, Christianity is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. And judgmentalism cannot survive in that economy.

If we keep reading in John, the hatred of religious elite eventually leads to the cross, where grace is even *more* on display. They thought they were putting an end to him, but they were actually helping him make his main point in the clearest way possible. The cross is Jesus taking the enemy's main weapon, death, and using it against him. The cross is the righteous offered up for the unrighteous. It's the Holy One offered up for the unclean and impure. It's the perfect commentary on our undeservedness AND God's lavish love, at the same time.

Unlike the religious guys in John 8, Jesus is the only one among us who was without sin. He is the only one who doesn't deserve death, and yet he laid down his life for us. And in whatever ways you're a rebellious sinner, and in whatever ways you are a vulnerable victim, the cross of Jesus is a fountain of hope and peace for you. It's *the* place where both the oppressed and the oppressor can find healing. The cross is God's declaration, "Come and belong, and go and sin no more." It's not just our entry-point into relationship with God, but our daily life-source of grace and truth.

Read John 7:32-52...

1. What are your thoughts about how this passage isn't included in the earliest John-manuscripts?
2. Have you ever felt shame like the girl in this passage? When/why?
3. Have you ever felt self-righteousness like the religious leaders in this passage? When/why?
4. In what ways is grace shocking?
5. Personally, what stood out to you the most about this passage/message?
6. How is the cross of Jesus the ultimate place that we should look to understand God's grace?