

Lent V

Cycle C, 4.7.19

Isaiah 43:16-21/Philippians 3:8-14/John 8:1-11

KINDNESS ROCKS

A surgeon and his wife were invited to dinner at the home of friends. The surgeon was enjoying a drink in the kitchen as his host was about to carve the roast. "Would you like to do the honors, Doc?" his friend said. The surgeon politely declined. As he carved the roast, his friend teased, "So how's my technique, Doc? I think I'd make a pretty good surgeon, huh, Doc? It's all in the wrist. You know, I might take your job." The doctor laughed good-naturedly, having endured this kind of humor many times before - an "occupational hazard" in his field of medicine. When he finished, the host proudly displayed the tray of beautifully sliced roast beef. "So what d'ya think, Doc?" "Not bad," the surgeon replied. "Now, let's see you put them all back together."



Most of us are pretty good at taking things apart - especially other people. Like the Pharisees and scribes in today's Gospel, we're able with surgical precision, to point to the mistakes and shortcomings, to the sin and failure in others. But Jesus asks: *What about the evil and sin and failure within ourselves?* We're well practiced in criticizing and condemning, but Jesus challenges us to the much harder work of

healing and transforming evil into good, of bringing into the light the things of God that remain unseen in the darkness of fear and ignorance.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks both the woman's accusers and the woman herself to move beyond their standards and expectations, to go deeper than the rules and law, to see beyond what is readily apparent. He challenges them - and us - to look beyond our disappointments in our mutual failures and lift one another up when we stumble. He asks us to look within our own hearts to confront the sins and evil that are part of every life and find within ourselves the compassion and love of God that leads to true and lasting joy, to healing and life.

We're often hardest on ourselves in the criticism we dole out. Rather than seeing ourselves as "works in progress," people who are still straining to move ahead and to grow into the full person in Christ, we chide ourselves for not being "perfect" - a goal we can never attain in this life anyway. St. Paul struggled mightily with that problem and he had to come to the realization that he's still in the race, still running to reach the goal:

It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it.

I look forward each Lent to the beautiful refrain of the hymn we sing as we approach the altar to receive the Eucharist: *Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be. Set your seal upon my heart and live in me.* Today it echoes our beloved story from John's gospel of the Woman Caught in Adultery.

In today's gospel, there is God. There is the soul of the woman caught in sin. But there is also the people of Israel caught in unfaithfulness. If we look closer into that circle, there is the Church caught in the shame of our public humiliation because of the sins of some of our clergy and leaders... there is our government caught in moral confusion between national self-interest and international responsibility, between concern for the haves and little thought for the have-nots; there is each one of us, our soul, face to face with God. All we need is that moment – the moment when Christ's eyes look into ours. The moment when we can acknowledge our faults and admit our dependency on the kindness of God.



When the evangelical preacher Billy Graham was alive I occasionally watched him on TV when he would lead a revival service in a football or baseball stadium. Tens of thousands of people listening to his powerful testimony – hearts moved to invite Christ into their lives. At the end of his preaching he would issue an “altar call” – an invitation for anyone in that stadium to come forward and give his or her life to Christ. I love the hymn they sang as hundreds of people came forward. It's the same sentiment as our communion refrain:

*Just as I am, though tossed about,
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fighting and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, You will receive,
Will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because Your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

Graham wrote about his own conversion in 1934, “I didn't have any tears, I didn't have any emotions, I didn't hear any thunder, there was no lightning. But right there, I made my decision for Christ. It was as simple as that and as conclusive.” There is still time in this season of Lent to do just that – to experience the silence of Jesus in the face of any accusations we bring against ourselves, and to have that moment when Christ's eyes look into ours and we hear his words of compassion: *Has no one condemned you?... neither do I. Go and sin no more.*

Did you notice the large pile of smooth rocks on the parking lot before you reached the plaza to come into church. They made me a little nervous. I thought maybe they were for me – parishioners ready to stone me because the Community Center project is taking so long. [Sorry, I can't control the weather!] But I also saw some stones around the office and the chapel. They're brightly-painted with phrases on them like: *Spread Joy!*



One of our parishioners found out about a movement called “The Kindness Rocks” Project which encourages people to leave rocks painted with inspiring messages along the path of life. She took the initiative to leave some around our parish property and she painted one for each third grade child in our school and faith formation programs.



I find that much better than stockpiling rocks to hurl at ourselves and others. The mission of the “Kindness Rocks” Project is very close to the mission of Christian discipleship:

***One message
at just the right moment
can change someone’s entire
day, outlook, life.***

Jesus’ one message for the woman
in the gospel changed her life.

May the message of Jesus’ love and mercy
do the same for you and me.

John Kasper, OFS

