

# The St. John's Pulpit

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## **JESUS WOULDN'T**

### **SKIP HIS QUIET TIME OR CONDEMN A SINNER**

*Lenten Series: Imitating the Spirituality of Jesus: What Jesus Wouldn't Do*

*Mark 1:35-36; John 8:2-11*

Third Sunday during Lent, February 28, 2016  
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Mara was afraid. She was being dragged into the Temple by scribes and Pharisees. They stopped in front of a Rabbi who was teaching in the Temple courts. The Rabbi ceased his teaching as the Pharisees pushed Mara toward the front of the crowd. Mara stood there, head down, wrapped in embarrassment and shrouded with shame. She was not politically savvy. She had no idea that protecting the status quo is always the purpose of public humiliation. In the silence of that awkward moment, a Pharisee spoke, “*Rabbi, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. Now, in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say?*”

The Rabbi was silent. He bent down and extended his fingers to write on the ground. During those few seconds of odd silence, Mara noted the Pharisee called her, ‘*this woman,*’ as if she were not a person; as if she had no name or story. Her mind ran down memory lane and the journey that brought her to this moment.

When Mara was nine years of age, her mother died. Her three older brothers and her father expected her to be the woman of the house. She missed the nurture her mother provided and was lonely for friendship. Her mother’s sisters were helpful to teach Mara what she did not know about household duties. Eventually, her older brothers married and left home. This left her to care for their father who had been injured in a construction accident. She did what she needed to do to provide food for them. Women in their Jerusalem neighborhood avoided her and the men of Jerusalem used her as their toy. There was one man who seemed to care for Mara. She did not know he was married at first. And, by the time she learned he was married, her emotional entrapment by him was so strong that she was confused. Now, standing in the Temple, she realized he had agreed to betray her to the Pharisees so as to extricate himself from their situation. His privacy was protected of course; he had power as a free male.

Mara had a story. Every person has a story. Rabbi Jesus knew that to be true. He knew this to be nothing more than another trap from the Pharisees and their scribes. He knew that women were almost never stoned to death for adultery. Yet, he also knew that if he said, “*it doesn't matter what Moses told you,*” that he could be misunderstood. Jesus knew it is possible to believe in the spirit of Truth in scripture without being a literalist. Yet, most of those who heard his teachings did not understand this concept. Jesus also knew that he could not

tell them to stone her because Roman law did not allow this to occur without Roman approval. So, Jesus may have written in the dirt to buy him some time while he pondered his options.

While Rabbi Jesus was doodling in the dirt and Mara was running down memory lane, the Pharisees continued to push on Jesus with questions. Finally, Jesus stood straight up, faced the Pharisees and started to speak. Mara closed her eyes and held her breath. Jesus said, *“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”* Then Jesus started writing in the dirt again. One by one by one by one, the rock-throwing society exited the Temple court. After a few minutes, Rabbi Jesus looked up; the disciples were still sitting there along with the crowd who had been listening to his teachings. Mara was the only one standing.

**Mara was like so many people who find themselves standing in sin’s spotlight with guilt as their shadow. Where could she go to hide?**

Jesus straightened himself again and spoke. This time, Jesus asked Mara a question: *“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”* And Mara said, *“No sir, not one.”* In this exchange, Jesus asked her to notice that her accusers should not control her life.

It was then that Jesus spoke words which have blessed humanity through the corridors of time: *“Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not allow sin to be your goal.”* This calls us to remember John 3:17 – *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”* Jesus saves us to pursue God’s will rather than sin; saves us from the consequences and residue of our sin; saves us from living in such a way that our accusers or our sins have a controlling influence over our futures; and saves us from building relationships, or communities or a world based on accusation, manipulation or condemnation. Jesus did not come to condemn; Jesus came to save us to be servants in the world, continuing his ministry of God’s mission.

This was Mara’s story. She was transformed spiritually from condemnation to salvation. We do not know what happened to Mara – or whatever her name or story may have been. Matthew’s Gospel tells us that on the day of Jesus’ crucifixion, *“Many women were also there, looking on from a distance...”* (Matthew 27:55). In my imagination, I can see Mara among them.

We gather in this sacred space today to worship the Holy One realizing Jesus reveals God to us as Love who does not condemn sinners – including us. Each of us has a story. Each of us has stood in sin’s spotlight with guilt as our shadow. We are thankful Jesus does not condemn sinners. **The only place to hide from your sin, guilt and shame is in the gracious mercy of The Loving God.**

Yet, that does not extricate us from our entire situation. Each morning, as we load our pockets, purses, backpacks and briefcases for the day, we must guard ourselves against packing rocks. It can be easy to condemn other people – even when we do not know their name or their story. Most every day, we cross paths with people who, if they could, would rewrite their story. Maybe their story changed in one decision or in one moment that

became a habit or an addiction. Maybe their story was partly written for them. Whatever may be the situation, we must allow God to shape our spirits; otherwise, we become part of the rock throwing society.

*“In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a quiet place and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for Jesus.”* Why; why were they hunting Jesus? They were hunting Jesus because there were many sinful and guilty people who were looking for him; they needed to be offered the gracious mercy of The Loving God. Jesus knew he could not serve others in healthy ways unless he invested in Quiet Time with God. Like walking a labyrinth, we move to the Quiet Center so we return to serve others with salvation rather than condemnation.



In some African villages, believers are devoted to prayer and quiet time with God. Each believer is assigned a separate spot outside of the village as their place of prayer. Over time, the paths to these places become well worn. If a believer begins to neglect prayer, it is soon apparent to the others. They go gently to them and say, *“Grass grows on your path.”*

Most people hear messages of condemnation every day. God sends us, as followers of Jesus, into the world with the good news of salvation. Yet, we must invest in quiet time with God so we have good news to share with them. If we seek to be servants of God on our own strength, we will burn out or become cynical. We cannot afford to allow grass to grow on our paths to prayer.

If you try to observe your discipline of Quiet Time with God in the same way day after day, you will grow tired and bored. Here is what I do: I explore various pathways in my prayer and Quiet Time with God. I sit in silence; make lists of ways God is using my life; pray for individuals, families, relationships & situations; journal; listen to music; meditate on scripture; imagine I am a character in one of Jesus’ parables; meditate on a devotional classic; or pray through the seasons of the Christian Year.

Now, be not afraid. I will not waste my time challenging each of you to awaken before dawn. However, people are looking for you every day. So, I remind you that if you want to imitate Jesus by refusing to condemn sinners, then you need to begin each day with some moments in the Quiet Center of God’s Presence so you can unpack all of your rocks and load up on gracious mercy.

Friends, I love you; but if Jesus needed to do this, so do you. Amen and AMEN!