

## Reflective Worship

### The woman caught in adultery

John 8:1-11

#### The Pharisee

My name is Jacob. I study the law – that's the Torah – the books of Moses – the law that God gave to his people. The law that binds us together as a nation. I am a Pharisee.

But this Jesus character has made me wonder.

Wonder about how we make decisions. How we decide what is right and what is wrong.

I've always lived according to a firm set of rules. You know where you are with rules. Either something is right or its wrong. There's no messing. Decisions come easily and quickly.

That's how the nation runs. Based on the rules from the Books of Moses. Tried and tested. Clear as a bell. This is right – this is wrong.

You shall do no work on the sabbath. What could be clearer. Well, Ok, over the years we've had to clarify exactly what is work and what isn't. A sabbath day's journey and all that. But its clear and simple.

And I've seen this Jesus dealing with people – he makes his decisions based on subjective things like love, compassion, forgiveness. A slippery slope to 'anything goes' if you ask me.

So we Pharisees had a meeting - we thought we needed to sort Jesus out once and for all. So we decided to present him with a situation where he has to give the right answer or show that he is blatantly ignoring the law. Where he can't be woolly and vague. A situation that would make him answer in a way that either doesn't show this love and forgiveness he is so keen on or shows he doesn't care for the law God has given us. In which case he can't be from God as he claims.

So we thought - Adultery – he can't possibly condone such an act. This will show people the truth about him! This will stop him leading people astray.

#### The Woman

Of course it was a set up. How could I have been so stupid as to think someone would actually love me. Not pretty. Not bright. Not even very mobile. I have a weak hip and even on a good day it's hard work to walk. No-one wants a wife like that. They want someone nice to look at, who will bear strong healthy children and do the heavy work at home. And of course, someone who brings some money with her. Not an orphan being supported by assorted relatives.

And then 'he' came along. I'd gone to the market to get something for one of the aunties. I remember there was lots of chatter, about the new prophet Jesus. I have to admit I lingered a bit. There was a group of Pharisees who were clearly very put out by him. I was just walking past when

I heard them say – “The common people hang on his every word. We can’t risk a riot. We have to find a way to discredit him.” Then they fell silent, and I felt their gaze on me.

And before I got back to auntie’s I felt someone jostle against me and I dropped what I was carrying. This man stopped, picked it up, apologised, and began to talk.

He was lovely. Lovely to look at. Lovely to listen to. So kind and concerned. He said so many lovely things to me. We walked and we talked and he said he had never met anyone as interesting and engaging as me. I laughed and pointed out my limp and my plain looks, but he said that they were just superficial and he could see my loving heart within.

In 15 minutes I was under his spell. Totally and completely.

We met again early the next day. He said he wanted to marry me. That he would arrange it all. He kissed me. I was besotted. He whispered, “why wait? I know a place we can go.....”

Fool!

He had chosen me carefully, with my bad leg. When the other Pharisees burst in on us, he fled. Back to his wife, presumably, who would dutifully give him an alibi. Whereas I couldn’t run a step.

I just had time to take hold of the sheet and wrap it around me before they grabbed me and dragged me off.

I was shaking with fear, and shame and remorse. But mostly because I had thought for one brief wonderful moment that I meant something to someone. That I was loved.

Instead, I had been betrayed.

## The Pharisee

So we brought before him a woman caught in the act of adultery. Surely she should be stoned to death as the law of Moses says. He went quiet. As if he knew he was trapped. Where is your so called ethic of love now, we thought? You will have to agree with us - the law is quite clear.

And we waited for him to say something

But he just bent down and started writing on the ground. What was he writing? We couldn’t see,

Then he straightened up, looked at the woman and then looked at us all. Really looked at us. As if he could see right into our minds and know what we were thinking. He unnerved me, and I guess he did the others too.

The he said, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”

He looked at each of us again, then at the woman. The crowd went silent.

Then he bent down and carried on writing. He concentrated on it, not looking up at all. Not at her, not at us. Just writing.

All eyes were on us – it was as if we were being tested, not him. I bent down and pick up a stone, feeling the crowd watching my every move.

I looked around at the others. Who was going to throw that first stone? The law clearly says she must be stoned. But I could see them all thinking. I knew I was thinking. I suppose according to the law we had all fallen short in some way – hadn't we? There must be some rules and regulations we haven't stuck to by the letter. Could we honestly say we were without sin?

But what does that mean? Does it mean we no better than her? Is that what he is trying to say. Anger began to stir up within me. Comparing me, comparing us with a woman like that. But ...

I looked around again. There was movement. Some of the older and I thought better and certainly wiser Pharisees had dropped their stones on the ground and were slowly walking away, clearly thinking deeply. Others followed them.

Soon I found that I was the only one left. I began to feel very exposed. All eyes were on me. Would I, could I throw that stone?

I thought about the times I hadn't kept the law. Small things I know. But he was right. I wasn't perfect.

I just couldn't bring myself to throw the stone

I needed forgiveness. Just like her I suppose.

I dropped my stone on the ground, turned and walked slowly away.

## The Woman

Talk about Jesus to anyone who has met him and we all say the same thing.

His eyes.

All the time the Pharisees were ranting he was looking at me. I was too ashamed. I tried to look away. But something drew me back, to return his gaze.

It was like he could see into my very soul.

They talk a lot about judgement, these religious leaders. I've always been in fear of it – assuming that I will be found wanting. Found guilty.

Yet the judgement of Jesus was not like that. It was a laying bare of truths. A seeing of reality. He saw my fault, my failing - and the cruel circumstances which had led me there. My God-given capacity for love, taken and twisted by a broken world, broken people, broken hopes.

He did not condone. But neither did he condemn.

When they had all put down their stones and slunk away, he stood and held my gaze once more. Held it in love – in a completely different kind of love from anything I had ever experienced before. A love which told me that I *do* matter, that I *am* enough – just as I am, that I am a beloved child of God, and that there is nothing he wouldn't do for me.

He set me free – in so many ways. And so I made the only response that I could. I offered that freedom back to him - became one of his followers. My Lord and my God.