

The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'God's judgment is just and merciful'. In the gospel reading we note that Jesus has probably spent the night in prayer and at dawn appears in the Temple courts in Jerusalem. This seems to be a practice for Jesus as there were people who gathered around him and listened to his teachings. As he was teaching, the Teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who was caught in adultery. They made her stand before the crowd and said, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.' 'The Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women, now what do you say?'

According to the law in Leviticus 20:10-12 and Deuteronomy 22:22-24, the stipulation was that if a man committed adultery or slept with a girl who was engaged to someone else, then both the man and the woman were to be put to death by stoning, and occasionally by burning. This law was still in force in the late first century AD. The accused were correct in the citation of the law, but they were wrong in the application of it because the man who had committed adultery was conspicuous by his absence. The man who committed the crime was not present as though adultery happens in 'isolation.'

The question that the Pharisees and the Teachers of the law asked was a trap question. They anticipate that Jesus will uphold the law and condemn the woman to death. But if Jesus did that, then he would be contradicting his own message of God's love for sinners. If Jesus acquitted her, he would be seen as one who was opposing the Jewish law and therefore would be brought to justice. Either way, they knew that Jesus would be trapped. Jesus bends down and starts to write something on the ground with his finger and does it twice. What was it that Jesus wrote? The writing may have been similar to the writing on the wall which Belshazzar saw regarding his impending judgment (Daniel 5:5-9, 24- 28). The king was terrified and convicted of his sin, even though he did not understand the meaning of the words. Some people suggest that Jesus wrote a list of the sins of the accusers. Whatever Jesus wrote brought fear in their own minds and it disturbed them. Jesus then tells them, 'If any one of you is without sin; let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' By invoking judgment on the woman caught in adultery they had invoked judgment on themselves. Once the people heard this, they all began to leave one by one with the older ones leaving first until Jesus was left with the woman still standing there. Jesus then asked the woman 'Where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, Sir', she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin.'

People normally judge others from their own perspective but judgment ultimately

belongs to the Lord. In this incident the Pharisees and the Teachers of the law had conveniently forgotten to bring in the man who was equally guilty but were ready to accuse the woman. This indicates a patriarchal attitude where the men tended to accuse the women. There are several inconsistencies in their account of the woman caught in adultery: First of all, how did they know that the woman had committed adultery? As per the law a person could only be accused when they were caught in the act of adultery. If so, what were the Teachers of the law doing there?! Secondly, they failed to produce the man who was also equally involved. There is no justice or fairness in what the men did, but God's justice is always just and merciful. In this incident the Pharisees and the Teacher of the law who were the accusers became the guilty ones, according to God's judgment. They were the ones who were demanding punishment for the woman, but in the end they turn out to be the accused.

The woman herself who came in as guilty and accused was not condemned by Jesus. Instead, Jesus challenged her to abandon her life of sin. Jesus does not condone sin, but instead forgives her and encourages her to start a new life without sin.

Very often our tendency is to judge others through our own coloured lenses quite severely. However, when it comes to ourselves we tend to be very lenient. We invoke God's judgment on others while we ourselves do the same things. God's kindness, forbearance and patience are intended to lead us to repentance. We need to remember that God's judgment is just and merciful. However, we should not abuse his mercy and his grace and expect to be saved from judgment. May we always examine our own hearts and minds before we point fingers at others remembering how God has been merciful to us.

Shalom
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