

“Things That Made Jesus Mad” / 4” Judgmentalism

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Key Texts: John 17.21, John 8.1-11, Romans 3.23; Romans 6.23; John 3.17; Psalm 139.23-24

Key Words: Judgmentalism, Polarized, Masks, Adulterous woman, Naked woman, Gracism, Stoning

Summary: In a world becoming increasingly polarized and judgmental, how desperately we need to see Jesus’ response to a woman so harshly judged by religious people like us.

Welcome to Capital City ... in person and online ... We are so glad you’re connecting with us! In this weird, weird time we’re living in we need to be connecting with God and to be connecting with each other. God didn’t make us to go it alone.

Now, we’re in a strange place as a church family. In some ways we are doing remarkably well.

- I don’t have a good explanation for this, but even though we didn’t have in-person services for 2-3 months, and even though our in-person numbers now are half what they were in January and February ... financially we are strong! We’ve held our spending down, and we’re above budget in our giving! We’re still investing in ministry! All I can say is, we have an amazing God and some incredibly God-honoring people in this church family. So, thank you, guys!
- And ... during the time we couldn’t meet in person, we greatly expanded our reach online. And now that we’re back meeting in-person, we’re busting the curve! I read one report last week that said that churches that were reopening were seeing 15, 20, 25% of their pre-Covid numbers. Randy and I think the number is a little better than that: somewhere around 30% and holding. Here at CapCity we’re right at 50% ... We’re busting the curve. And we’re still trying to strengthen our online ministry.
- And ... We have a baptism this morning! How cool is that! That’s what we’re all about. And at the CIY events we sponsored a week ago, 25 kids made some kind of a decision to step up their Jesus following! Guys that’s what we’re all about!

So, in some ways CapCity is doing remarkably well! But in other ways ...

- Well, we do have a baptism this morning! And I can’t tell you how excited I am! So it breaks my heart that this will be the first time we have used this baptistery since the 8th of March, 4½ months ago.
- And the idea that we’re breaking the curve for in-person attendance because about 50% of us are back ... that breaks my heart. Don’t get me wrong: I understand that many of you online need to be extra cautious, and I’m not criticizing your choice to protect yourselves physically or those you’re caring for. It breaks my heart because I want more for you, and I hope you want more for you, and I think ... God wants more for you. I hope you miss being here. I hope what we do here is worth missing. We were made to do life with God together: shoulder to shoulder, face to face.

My study partner, Randy, and I were talking about this stuff last week and his theory is that our church family kind of clusters into 4 groups.

- One group has just disconnected from church. The numbers are scary high of those who have just disconnected – they are no longer here, and they aren’t connecting online. Church has just kind of faded away for them
- A second group has kind of decided they like church online, better than in-person. How cool is that: pajamas and coffee. And, if you want to sleep in, just fire up the service whenever it’s more convenient for you. Online is enough, they have decided.

- A third group is doing church online, but you hope it's temporary. Or, it's simply the best you can do right now. You are one of those who needs to be extra cautious, or you are taking care of someone who needs you to be extra cautious. Or maybe you just don't think we're being quite cautious enough yet. We understand. We really do.
- And there's a fourth group, those who are back in-person. And here at CapCity, in greater numbers than in most church families.

Guys, I care about numbers ... I care about numbers a lot. Because numbers are people. I care about how many we baptize – because people need Jesus. And I care about how many are here in-person, and how many are connecting online. Because as long as there are people out there who need God's grace and God's truth, we've got work to do. So, when the numbers are down, it creates an atmosphere where it's pretty easy to be discouraged, to feel sorry for yourself. And I've been struggling with that discouragement. I wish you could remember the energy and momentum we had in January, and February, before all this nonsense! But feeling sorry for yourself doesn't do any good, does it? And it doesn't get the job done. We're still on a mission from God: to bring people face to face with Jesus, and grow them into Christ-Driven 24-7 Jesus followers. So ... what are we going to look like in a month, 3 months, 6 months, a year from now? I don't know. But we're going to try to figure out how to get it done whatever the new normal looks like.

And it's more than the pandemic itself that has ... troubled our church family. There are tears in the fabric of our family, fractures that threaten to divide us. Right before Jesus died, he prayed this prayer for us. He said, "I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me." (John 17.21) That's how important it is: If they can't see us being one, they won't believe in the Jesus we follow ... at least we make it way harder for them! And this family is becoming more and more polarized.

We're tearing at each other over stuff like these masks. Some here see them as more politics than science; more about a government bent on overreach and control than a reasoned response to a very real risk. Others here see them as a simple sign of love ... loving someone else. Is it that too much to ask, they ask? And instead of grace towards those who can't see our truth, we're tearing at each other. I know I have oversimplified it all. If you want, I'll lay out the whole case, for both sides. I think I could make a compelling case ... for both sides!

And now it's not just the pandemic. This church family is divided over the racial issues that are tearing our country apart right now. These demonstrations, these demands different groups are making, there are CapCity people on both sides. If it erupted into violence – God forbid – CapCity people would be trying to hurt each other. What divides us is threatening to overwhelm what holds us together. That's awful! And there's an election coming. And I think the polarization is going to get worse. Don't you?

Guys, listen, our differences are not the problem. Of course, we're going to disagree! I don't even agree with myself all the time! It's not our disagreements, it's the vitriol and the judgmentalism that will tear us apart. It's when we condemn and denounce each other, and when we vilify and disparage each other, and when we mock and ridicule each other. Even online! As we let what we disagree over dismantle the bond that holds us together. Jesus said, "I pray that they may all be one. Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, (why?) so that the world will believe that you sent me." (John 17.21) This ... "sin" ... of judgmentalism is tearing at the church, and it will undermine our mission from God. I'll show you.

We are in week 4 of a series of studies on things that made Jesus mad. I know, most people don't picture Jesus as mad, and they shouldn't! Jesus didn't go around mad, angry, looking for a fight. But he did get mad ... whenever anyone was blocking access to the love and grace of his Father, our God. When we push someone away from our Father's love, it makes Jesus mad.

- He got mad in the temple, when they turned the Court of the Nations, the Court of the Gentiles into a mall, preventing the Gentiles from connecting with God. That was 3 weeks ago, if you want to catch up online.
- When Jesus wanted to talk to a Samaritan woman, he actually sent his disciples away. I think he was afraid their prejudice would push her away from God's grace. He hates it when any of our prejudices push anyone away from God's grace. That was two weeks ago.
- And he got mad when they tried keeping kids away from him. They were marginalizing the kids, they were treating the kids like they didn't matter ... as much. And that made Jesus mad. That was last week.

And today is about ... judgmentalism. Judgmentalism makes Jesus mad. And we're going to look at one of my favorite Jesus stories, it is so powerful! It's about a woman who is known as, "the woman caught in adultery." How would you like to be named after your biggest sin? We don't even know her name. She's just, "The adulterous woman," "The woman caught in the act." Randy calls her, "The naked woman," "Jesus and the naked woman." That may be the most poignant, maybe the most evocative.

Here's the story. Now Jesus is in Jerusalem, and it seems to be the Feast of Tabernacles, when the Jews kind of camped out in tents for a few days, remembering the way the way they did it after the Exodus when they were on the way to the Promised Land. And tens of thousands of Jews had flooded into Jerusalem, and they'd swarm the Temple every day. So, here it is: "Early the next morning Jesus was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them." (John 8.2) He's probably in that huge Court of the Gentiles we talked about 3 weeks ago. And this crowd is gathering around him.

Verse 3: "As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd." She had been caught in the act ... caught 'in the act' of adultery. Usually adultery takes two. So where is the guy? Maybe he's stronger, faster, so he got away. Or maybe they didn't care as much about his sin, as they did about hers. Or maybe, to them, it's not even really about her. It's about trapping Jesus. She meant nothing, to them. I don't know.

What I do suspect is that they wanted to shame and humiliate her, so they could shame and humiliate Jesus. So, I seriously doubt they gave her the time to make herself "presentable," after being caught "in the act" of adultery. I seriously doubt they wanted her to look anything but wanton, and lascivious, lewd. So, they drag this naked woman – if not literally naked, certainly in every other way – they drag her into the temple, and put her in front of the crowd ... they drag her right in here, right up here.

Now, how would you feel? It's the worst, the lowest, the most embarrassing moment of your life, and somehow in that moment the lights come up, and the iPhones come out, you're up there on screen, and everyone turns and looks at you. What is the one moment, the worst moment in your life. Maybe it's something you said: something so vile, so blasphemous, so cruel. Or maybe it's some sexual sin: you're caught in the act: adultery, porn, whatever. Maybe it's that moment you hit bottom because of some addiction. Maybe it's a moment of uncontrolled anger, or rage, or violence. Or some moment

when your unforgiveness and your bitterness are so visible in their ugliness. Imagine you are caught in the act, at that moment, brought up here, and put on display.

What would be worse, at that moment? To be dragged out onto the street in front of your neighbors? Or, to be humiliated and shamed in front of your enemies? Or, to be dragged into your church, in front of church people, like us, so we “holy people” could gawk at your sin? And how would we respond to the sinner, the sin exposed for all of us to see? What would you see in our eyes?

One guy ... one guy calls it “gracism.” I don’t really like the word, but I don’t have a better one. It’s kind of like racism, but while racism is about the color of your skin, gracism is about the color of your sin. Racism is about putting people in a box because God colored them differently, and then dissing them. Gracism is about putting people in a box because of some sin that is different than your own, a sin we judge to be worse than our own, and then dissing them. In other words, it’s kind of like I want God to follow my lead. I want him to grace the folks I find acceptable, and smoke those I don’t.

Because, there are some sins that are worse than others, right? We think. I’ve lost my temper many times, but I’ve never killed anyone ... physically. I’ve battled lust, once, maybe twice (that’s humor). But I’ve never committed adultery ... physically. That would be way worse, right? I’ve said some pretty hurtful things, but I have rarely ever ... cussed ... outloud ... like some of you guys. We act like some sins are way worse than others, right? No, it’s not right.

Listen, guys, this is about as basic as it gets:

- The Bible says, “Everyone has sinned.” How many of us? ___ Are you the exception? ___ Yeah, me neither. It says, “We all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” Every single one of us. (Romans 3.23)
- And then it says, “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6.23) Which means, I have earned death, and you have earned death. Which means the only shot we’ve got is the “gift,” the unearned gift of life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Which means that none of us – not one of us – has the right to be judgmental!

Now ... this may be a stretch, but I wonder if this “naked woman” made Jesus think of his mom. Don’t go there, that’s not what I mean. What I mean is, the way they were judging this woman, that’s how so many judged Mary. They called her an adulteress, too. After all, she was engaged and pregnant. And Joseph claimed he wasn’t the dad. Which made Mary an adulteress, in that world. No one believed her “virgin birth” story. You wouldn’t ... until the resurrection, maybe. That meant, in their eyes, she deserved to be dragged naked into the street, where everyone could see her ... sinfulness. Have you ever been there, maybe? A little different: Holy, and loved by God, but judged and despised by people?

Anyway, they spring their trap. “‘Teacher,’ they said to Jesus, ‘this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?’” (John 8.4) And they had him, they thought. Jesus was renowned for loving ... “sinners.” If he told them to stone her, maybe he’d lose the crowds. If he told them to set her free, he breaks the law, and how could a lawbreaker speak for God? And this wasn’t a little law. This is one of the big ten, right? In fact, it’s one of the few ten commandments most people remember. “Ten commandments? Uhh ... don’t lie, don’t steal, don’t commit adultery ... and a few others,” right? And the law was clear, an adulteress was supposed to die. It wasn’t just sex, or just “following your heart.” It was disobeying God, it was stealing from another man, and it was destroying his family.

So, the penalty in their law was stoning. Which isn't what most of us think it was. The Jewish lawbooks tell us they were to dig a pit and push the girl in. If the fall killed her, so be it. If it didn't kill her, the two witnesses who had caught her in the act were to find these really big rocks and throw them down onto the girl, trying to crush her. There are not the kind of rocks Ernest T. Bass throws through windows. These are the kind it takes all you've got to lift. And you try to crush her. If she survives your stones, the rest of the people would join in, until she's dead. This is serious stuff.

"So, they are trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stoops down and writes in the dust with his finger." (John 8.6) I wish someone had snapped a picture on their iPhone or fired up the video camera. Wouldn't you like to know what he was writing? I would. Tic Tac Toe? Probably not. Was he just doodling? Maybe. Some people think he was writing the 10 commandments, and maybe attaching names, maybe some of their names, to the sins they thought no one knew about. Maybe. I read one guy who said he thought Jesus wrote, "mene mene tekel parsin." From Daniel 5, words that God wrote on the wall as a message to the king. Numbered, weighed, divided. Your days have been numbered. You've been weighed, and found wanting. Your kingdom is about to be divided. That would be a fitting message to these twits, right? "You're days are numbered guys ... by God. You have been measured and found wanting ... by God. And you're going down!" In fact, some of you guys might want to put this one in your quiver. A kid doesn't do his homework: mene mene tekel parsin. Your husband forgets your anniversary: mene mene tekel parsin – you're days are numbered, you've been found wanting, and you're going down!

But maybe ... maybe ... Jesus is doing something bigger than all that with his doodling. He kneels down, and he starts writing. And they wait. And gradually their leering, sneering eyes start drifting from her, to him. And I suspect the longer he waited, the quieter it got. Where are their eyes now? On her, on her shame? Probably not so much. Where were their minds now? On her, on her sin? Probably not so much. Maybe ... literally ... Jesus forces them to stop judging her for just a moment. Wouldn't that be cool?

Well, "They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, 'All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!' Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust." (John 8.7-8) ... Listen, guys, where were his eyes? Where were Jesus' eyes? On her shame, or on theirs ... or on ours?

And it says, "When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest ..." Maybe ... maybe because sometimes we reach this moment of understanding that we are not good enough, or strong enough, or smart enough to make ourselves into the men or women we want to be, much less the men or women God wants us to be. Maybe some of the older guys saw that first ... "Until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman." (John 8.9)

I think ... I think if I could give each of you a gift, I would give you the gift of trading places with that woman for this one next moment. Just you and him. "Then Jesus stands up again and says to you, 'Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?' 'No, Lord,' you say. And Jesus says, "Neither do I. Now, go and sin no more." (John 8.10-11)

Where are your accusers? Or maybe worse than that, where are all those who hear of your sin, and judge your sin as worse than theirs. Where are all those who would condemn you, and denounce you, and vilify you, and disparage you, and mock you, and ridicule you ... and drive you away from God's grace ... if they knew. Gracism. How many times has my "gracism" made it harder for someone to experience the grace I crave? How many times has your judgmentalism driven someone

God loves away from his grace? Because, somehow, we see their sins as worse than ours. How stupid is that!

“Has no one condemned you?” ... Says the only one ever who had the right to condemn her. I wonder if, until that moment, she even knew her accusers had left – with her head bowed in shame, tears flowing. Then she looks up. And it’s only Jesus. ... Can you imagine her emotion ... your emotion? You thought you were dead! “No one, Lord?!” “Not even you, Lord?” She is still there, naked before Jesus. “Not even you?” Who are you? Why? And Jesus says, ... “Not even me” ... Says the only one who did have the right to throw the first stone.

Now ... it feels like Jesus got it wrong, right? He should have said, “Go and sin no more. And then I won’t condemn you.” “Stop sinning, and then you will taste the grace you crave.” But he didn’t. Instead he says: “I didn’t come to condemn you. In fact, I came to let the stones they aimed at you, the stones you deserve ... kill me, instead.” “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3.17)

It makes no sense to us. This story makes no sense. This grace makes no sense. We’re forgiven when we’re at our worst? You think your sin is too big, right? Bigger than this woman’s sin. Or maybe you think you’ve sinned the same sin too often, right? You’ve out-sinned God’s grace, right? Or maybe, you think you’re a fraud, your sins are hidden by so many masks, and you hope those around you will never see underneath your masks. And you fear that if God really does see everything, if he really does know you ... what chance have you got? Would Jesus really say to you, “Neither do I ... condemn you”? Could grace actually be that big? ... Yeah, it can ... Yes, it is.

Someday, guys, someday it will be each of us ... standing naked before God. Not physically, maybe. I don’t know. Simply, without secrets, without masks, without excuses. And what happens next depends on what you do now, in this life. So, guys, take off your clothes ... not literally. I mean, strip away everything you use to hide your sin. because he already knows. Guys, you are already there. You are alone with Jesus right now. Not physically, in this room, but spiritually – it’s you and him. This is the moment we get it: he knows everything. There’s nothing he doesn’t see, nothing he doesn’t know – the sins of your tongue, your sexual sins, your addictions, your unforgiveness, your greed, your pride, your judgmentalism ... whatever. And if you listen to him, you’ll hear him say, to you, “I didn’t come to condemn you, I came to take the punishment you deserve. Now, go and live like a man or a woman who has been forgiven, and dignified, and who is loved by our Father.” It’s that moment we stand before God with ruthless honesty and humility ... that we are bathed in grace.

Now, listen guys, there are two groups who need this message – and some of us fit in both groups. Some of us need grace, and some of us need to do some repenting. Some of you have never had an encounter with Jesus like this before, and you need what she found. But others of us call ourselves Jesus followers, and we drive people away from our Lord through our judgmentalism. So, listen, one more piece. ... We don’t know what happens next. We don’t know if this ... “naked woman” became a Jesus follower. And even if she did, even if she accepted his forgiveness of her sins, she’s been outed. Her scandal is no longer a secret, it’s something people would whisper about, maybe for the rest of her life. She’d probably go to her grave with that scarlet letter branded on her chest. How do you think she would be treated if she joined the other Jesus followers for worship? How would she be received here? Her sins are open, they are known; ours are hidden, right? Her sins are big; ours are littler, right? Right! (*sarcasm*) Would she be judged here, or would she be graced? Would we strengthen her connection to the God who has graced us all? Is this a safe place for sinners? Guys, some of us need to drop our rocks and walk away.