

Woman Caught

a musical homily based on John 7:10-8:11

by Susan Hulsman Bingham

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Rev. Dale Grandfield, Rector

Anthony Sharp, organist and choirmaster

WOMAN (*facing the congregation*)

Close to the time of the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus's family headed to Jerusalem to join the celebrations. But Jesus chose not to travel with them because the authorities were looking for a way to kill him. But then he changed his mind and went up when the feast was already half over. He was careful and remained out of sight. Interest in him was intense. One of the leaders asked if anyone had seen Jesus. The answer was no. "He's a good man," said one, "though I cannot say this out loud, for fear I'll get into trouble with the authorities." And there he came, despite all. What could he be thinking, showing up, teaching again after all that has happened? They almost arrested him the other day. "'Tis true," they said, "yet he knows so much, though he has not been schooled." (*JESUS appears behind the WOMAN and represents her memory at this point.*)

JESUS

My message is not my own. It comes from God who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or merely my own. Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves. But a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies. Moses gave you the law, but none of you obeys it. And I know that some of you are trying to kill me. Or you think I am demon-possessed and pretend not to know of this plot. I did one miracle on the Sabbath. You were offended. But you work on the Sabbath, too, which the patriarchs before Moses allowed! You observe the law to the letter. I am here so that the heart of the law may be revealed. Please look beneath the surface. Only then can you judge rightly!

WOMAN

Some people said that this man was surely the Messiah. Others said, "This cannot be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? Scripture states that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, where King David was born!" They wanted him arrested. 'Twas amazing that nothing happened to him then. No one laid a hand on him. Temple guards simply turned away and returned to the temple, leaving Jesus alone. Then the officers and chief priests and Pharisees came, and they said to the guards, "Why have you not brought him?" The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken like this!" The Pharisees were not deceived. "Not one of us

rulers or Pharisees believes in him. The foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law!” Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier, and was one of their number, asked if our law condemns a man without first hearing his case, find out what he has been doing. They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it and you will find that a prophet comes not out of Galilee.” And then they all went home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (Jesus appears and listens. The woman continues, unaware of his presence.) At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts. People gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees dragged me in, having found me with a man. They made me stand before them. “Teacher,” they said, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery! In the law of Moses, it says that we should stone such a woman. What do you say?” They were using this question to entrap him, so they could accuse him. Trap him! (*JESUS bends down and writes on the ground.*) Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. This confused them. Was he buying time? They resumed their questions. (*JESUS stands.*) After a time, he straightened up and said to them . . .

JESUS

Let that person who is without sin cast the first stone at her. (*JESUS kneels again and writes in the dust.*)

WOMAN (*still recounting events to the congregation; JESUS seems to be part of her memory*) Then he knelt again and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away, one at a time, the elder ones first. Jesus was left alone with me. (*JESUS stands.*) He stood and asked me . . .

JESUS

Woman, where are they? (*Finally the WOMAN turns to JESUS.*) Has no one condemned you?

WOMAN (*At last interacting with JESUS*)

No-one, Sir.

JESUS

Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and live in the truth of who you are. Go and live. Go and live. (*JESUS departs, and the WOMAN returns to the “present” and faces the congregation.*)

WOMAN

I was dragged in alone.

They left my lover behind.

I was to be used as a tool to make Jesus known

As an imposter to be maligned.

Roman law forbids death by stoning.

Should Jesus order this, he’d face arrest.

But if he asked for my release, on the other hand,

His authority the leaders would contest.

Honoring the law of his people,
Jesus reluctantly agreed that I be slain,
But order'd the first to throw a stone
Be sinless, innocent of blame.

Hearing this, not one accuser acted.
Jesus knelt again and wrote in the dust,
Eyes kindly kept down so not to witness the shame
of each Pharisee as he turned and left.

It struck me then how costly this love
Shown me by a man himself in danger
Who drew rage and accusation away from me,
Making himself the focus of the Pharisees' anger.

I felt seen for the first time in my life,
By this man who did not even know my name.
He neither judged me nor acquitted me,
But shielded me. Then he freed me, my life to reclaim.
He shielded me and freed me, my new life to claim.

THE END

References:
Dr. Michael Ryce, Aramaic scholar
Kenneth E. Bailey, JESUS THROUGH MIDDLE EASTERN EYES