18th Sunday after Pentecost

**“You Are Okay”**

John 8:1-11 / September 26, 2021

**Whispering ‘You’re the Problem’**

According to child psychologists, even if children receive nine compliments, they are more influenced by their one- time experience of being scolded. When scolded, children think, “I have a problem, I am not a good child.” There is no such thing as the best way or a single correct way to raise a child. But the most important principle to all children is that parents don't let their child think, “I’m a problem child.”

My parents were strict with my older brother and scolded my younger sister a lot, but they weren't strict with me, and they didn't scold me too much because I was always weak. I received a lot of love and care from my parents, and they were very generous to me. While studying counseling, I am often tasked with self-reflection, and it was difficult for me to find my childhood wounds. However, when I looked deeply, I realized that even though I was cared for so kindly, I also had wounds I received from my parents.

Even if parents do not dislike their children, the children experience a moment of indifference as dislike; even if parents do not hit their children, the children experience it as violence when the parent yells at them; even if parents give their children a lot of love, the children are sensitive and feel as if they are not loved when parents fight with each other.

Most of us experienced such trauma as a child. Those wounds remain within us without healing properly. The wounds instill in us a deep feeling of ‘I am a problem’, and we hide this consciousness deep inside. A condemnation is a declaration that ‘you are a problem.’ The reason we get angry when someone criticizes us is that it feels like other people are trying to expose our sense of ‘I am a problem’ that we have been trying to hide. All conflicts are a process of exchanging the thought, ‘you are a problem,’ with each other through all kinds of messages, including words.

When we are criticized, we feel very unsecure because our hidden wounds are touched. At this time, we often take out the shield of pride and try to defend ourselves. But in fact, it is a very powerless shield. It can’t protect us from the sharp knife poking around saying, ‘you are a problem.’ The only shield that can protect us from the knife is not pride, but healthy self-esteem. No matter what anyone says, we need a strong sense of ‘I’m okay, I am not a problem.’ So, how can we have such a healthy self-esteem? Let’s find the answer in the gospel story of Jesus.

**Jesus’ Saying ‘You Are Okay’**

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus. They made her stand before the group, grabbing stones in their hands, and with angry faces they were about to throw stones at her. As soon as one of them were to start throwing stones, they would all have joined in until they killed her. One of them asked Jesus an embarrassing question. **“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” (8:4-5)**

If Jesus told them not to stone her, he was breaking the law, and if he told them to stone her, he would be a heartless person. It was a clever trap. All eyes were on Jesus’ mouth. Just before the explosion of people’s anger and hatred, at that suffocatingly tense moment when a single word would be the difference between life and death, Jesus unexpectedly quietly bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

What was the writing on the ground? Even biblical scholars are divided. Some ancient manuscripts of the bible record that Jesus’ writings on the ground were lists of people’s sins, but that is most likely an interpretation added by later people. A careful reading of today’s text reveals that the content of the writing on the ground is not at all important here. The act of Jesus bending over and writing something on the ground with his finger had a different meaning. What is it?

As Jesus bent down and slowly wrote on the ground, the people had to wait in silence, watching Jesus’ act. The silence and stillness emanating from that slow gesture would have cooled down the intense anger and hatred that filled people’s hearts. Maybe people thought, ‘What am I doing?’ In the silence of that short moment, the stone would have felt unfamiliar in their hand. When people’s hearts were calmed down, Jesus said,

**“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” (8:7)** At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus asked her, **“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (8:10)** The woman replied, **“No one, sir.”** Jesus finally declared, **“Then neither do I condemn you.” (8:11)**

At that time, Jewish society regarded an adulterous woman as a sinner serious enough to be stoned to death on the spot. From today's point of view, it is difficult to understand, and even in an ancient society, it seems barbaric and violent. However, in view of the religious rules and ethical standards of the people at the time, this woman was a person with serious problems that no one could dispute. So, people got ready to throw stones at her. They were saying to her: ‘You are a sinner! You are the problem!’

But Jesus did not do that. After all those who wanted to condemn her by throwing stones at her had gone away, Jesus said to the woman: “No one condemns you. Then neither do I condemn you.” Jesus didn't mean that the woman was innocent, but that he wouldn't judge her even if she had sinned. People try to solve the problem of sin with ‘condemnation or judgement’, but Jesus solved it with ‘no condemnation or no judgement’.

**‘You Are Okay’**

I think this point is very important. The problem of sin is not solved by condemnation. Rather, it can be resolved by not condemning. I don't know why Christianity, the religion of love and forgiveness, has so often become a religion of judging and condemning others. I don’t know why people who believe in Jesus don’t take the way of ‘not condemning’ like Jesus, but rather do take the way of ‘condemning’ like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Why does Jesus always say there is no problem, but we constantly say there is a problem?

We grow up with a hidden self-consciousness of ‘I am a problem’, acquired through the wounds of childhood. Through everything we experience after becoming adults, we continue the experience of reaffirming the wound that ‘I am a problem’ again and again. While working, doing business, raising children, living with a spouse with a different personality, experiencing life not going the way we want, and experiencing dreams that fail, we confirm and reconfirm that ‘I am a problem.’ That’s why we are all thirsty for the words ‘you are not a problem, you are okay’.

What alcohol, drugs, infidelity, and gambling have in common is that they temporarily weaken the awareness of ‘I am a problem’ and maximizes the awareness of ‘I am okay’. However, it is false remedy and only lasts for a very short time. We need to hear a real declaration of ‘I am okay, I am not a problem.’ We need to hear the powerful word that washes away all the wounds that have been hidden for a long time, that we are beautiful as we are, and that we are okay as we are.

Therefore, in today's text, I want you to listen to what Jesus said to us, not the woman. “No one condemns you. Then neither do I condemn you.” What does this mean? It means that ‘you are not a problem, you are okay!’ Please let go of the wounds you had as a child and keep the words of Jesus in your heart. Do you know who most often painfully condemns you? It is yourself. Please forgive and accept yourself. You have no problem. You are not a problem. You are fine. You are really okay!

To believe in Jesus is to hear the word of Jesus every day saying, ‘You are okay, you are not the problem’. In addition, to believe in Jesus is to say to the people we meet, ‘You are okay too, you are not the problem either.’ This does not mean that we do not have problems (sin), but that it is okay to have problems (sin). So, let’s tell our children that they are okay. Let’s tell our spouse that they are okay. Let’s tell a stranger and a different person that they are all okay.

The phrase ‘you are okay’ is not just a generous phrase, it is a key concept in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gentiles are okay, Jews are okay. Sinners are okay and women are okay. Orphans and widows are okay, and the sick and tax collectors are okay. I am okay and you are also okay. When we say, ‘you are okay,’ we grow to be decent beings together. We recover and grow within that generous fence of ‘you are okay.’ Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the very word that God has declared to all mankind, ‘you are okay.’ Everyone, you are really okay!