

The Woman Accused of Adultery

By Joyce Catherwood

John 8:1-11

Just before dawn, the door to our hiding place burst open and slammed against the wall. Scribes and Pharisees stormed in, screaming, “Adulteress!”

They grabbed me and shoved me toward the door. I glanced back at the man I had trusted with my heart and deepest needs. He just stared at the floor. Why did they leave him behind? I later learned that my foolish indiscretion had thrust me into the middle of a malicious plot to entrap and accuse the popular rabbi, Jesus.

I was immediately sandwiched between two fast-walking Pharisees, who gripped my arms so tightly they left bruises. I had no time to cover myself appropriately. Fighting back tears and ashamed, I looked down as they rushed me through the streets, passing shopkeepers and vendors setting up for the day. I felt sickened and humiliated beyond words.

When we arrived at the temple courts, my band of captors plowed through a large gathering until we reached Jesus. He was seated, teaching. The two Pharisees pushed me in front of Jesus loudly proclaiming they had caught me in the act of adultery. As I stood there disheveled and openly exposed, I could only imagine the looks of sheer disgust and the salacious whispering going on behind me. I knew what I had done was so wrong, one of the gravest sins according to our law. But in our culture, marriages are arranged at childhood and are sometimes loveless. We become the property of husbands who can be arrogant and overbearing. Vulnerable and starved for affection, some risk seeking love elsewhere.

Then the Pharisees said: “The law of Moses says we should stone her. What do you say?”

I gasped as I heard those words. Roman law forbade capital punishment. Would they really stone me? Horrified, I looked at Jesus. He seemed to ignore their challenge, and instead, bent down and wrote in the dust with his finger. Frustrated, they continued to shout questions at him. Jesus finally straightened up and said, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone.” Then he bent down again, writing more.

Trembling, I waited for that first stone. Instead, to my surprise, my accusers began to slip away one by one, beginning with the most prominent. Jesus stood up and asked me, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

Shaken, I responded, “No one, sir.” Jesus then said, “Neither do I condemn you.” He told me I was free to go and should leave my life of sin.

I was astounded by Jesus’ tenderness and forgiveness. It was such a stark contrast to the contempt of the scribes and Pharisees. As I turned and made my way through the crowd, a woman handed me her shawl so I could cover myself. Once on the street, I walked away quickly. I felt the wind against my face and breathed deep, cleansing breaths of freedom. Jesus had pardoned me. So great was God’s mercy, it filled my empty heart and gave me new hope. ●