

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“They brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand before him. “Teacher, Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do you say?””

John 8: 2

Only the most brazen commit adultery in such a way that they do not care who knows. Most people, if they are being sexually unfaithful to a spouse, do not want anyone to know about it, least of all their spouse or their family. Adultery is often part of living a double life—one for public consumption and want for the real world of their own privacy and desires. There is a very good reason why the sixth commandment of the Decalogue commands us not to commit adultery. Adultery breaks faith. Adultery destroys trust. Adultery betrays the most serious vow a person can make. “I will be true to you in good times and in bad.” Adultery can destroy lives, families, homes, communities. You have seen it. Adultery is no light matter. Not for human beings. Not for God.

So here Jesus is with a woman caught in adultery. Right there in front of everyone. She is accused because she has been caught “in the act” so to speak. (An aside: Where’s the guy? How do you catch one of the two people committing and only bring forth one of them? What? Did he jump up, get dressed, and outrun everybody but she could not? Right there you know that there is something else going on here than her adultery.)

The kind and merciful rabbi is being challenged. Either act as brutally as these men want you to act in stoning her or risk losing your followers because you contradicted the teaching of Moses. Alas, these scribes and Pharisees are no match for Jesus. He knows too well the human heart. Jesus knows how people think sexually at times. He knows. He just gets them to face their own sexual thoughts and desires. They go away. But there’s the thing. Jesus bends down to write in the dirt. They leave. The woman is left there standing. And so, he looks up to her. I assure you, no one ever looked up to her. No condemnation. Just freedom. And an admonition. “Go, and do not sin any more.” We don’t know whether she did or not. What do you think? The question of the week.