

Songs of Acceptance and Transformation
John 8:1-11
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
August 16, 2020
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What a week it has been. And I suspect all of us have seen people working together...perhaps we have been in conversations with neighbors we didn't previously know. From my experience, that's what happens when disaster hits, when things go out of control...people find a way to come together.

And yet, today's scripture reminds us that there is another thing that sometimes happens when people gather together...and it is not community building. In fact, in this text - two things happen simultaneously that divide and destroy the community.

A woman is accused of adultery...and the primary objective is to trick Jesus.

And there is so much that is wrong with both of these.

Perhaps that starts with the obvious. If in fact, she has committed adultery, where is her partner? After all, as the saying goes, it takes two to tango. And the law of Moses is clear that if one is being accused and punished, both should be. So, where is he? Or, is he, as some scholars have suggested, even there in the circle of accusers, having tricked her too?

After all, the gospel writer tells us that this whole scene is really about tricking Jesus. This isn't about the faithful concern of religious leaders, but instead this woman is used as a prop for another purpose. This woman is used as a way to trick Jesus into doing or saying something that will give them the right to charge him with a crime, to get rid of him. See already, just in the previous chapter, we have heard that the authorities are trying to kill him or at least arrest him and yet every time they try something goes awry...they realize they don't have cause, people around him are too invested in who he is. So, here on this day, a woman comes in handy, or so they think.

And yet, Jesus doesn't fall for it. Instead, he responds by creating equity, leveling the playing field, perhaps you might say, by knocking them off their high horses. After all, instead of seeing these accusers for their positions of authority and this woman as defined by her sin, Jesus sees them all as human beings, none better than the other, and all needing to be honest.

"Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," he says.

And, let's be confident, he knew what would happen. He didn't really believe he was inviting her stoning. Instead, he asked them to look inside themselves and to see, not the differences, but the similarities between themselves and the woman they were accusing.

Really what Jesus did, even though we know it didn't feel that way to the accusers, was to create a safe space for everyone, a space that was ripe for transformation.

And yet, only the woman stayed. The religious authorities who were stopped in the tracks of their intentions, slunk away into the shadows where they would plot again for another day. Meanwhile, the woman stood before Jesus in plain sight, and she was set free.

Because what Jesus was really doing was creating a safe space, a space for honesty, a space for re-orienting, a space for transformation.

And there is much we can learn from Jesus because we all need to be transformed.

So, if we listen...if we pay attention...we are reminded of our need for honesty. While, and I've said this often, pointing out someone else's sin seems to be a favorite pastime of human beings, Jesus asks us instead to look inward and to learn to be honest about who we are.

But, let's be clear about the reason - this isn't so we can feel bad, so we can beat ourselves up, so we can only see our failures. Rather, this honesty is about inviting our better selves. It is based on the idea that until we can name our sins, we won't ever really turn from them. But when we can see ourselves clearly, both the parts we tout with pride and the parts we try to hide, then we can also become the best of who God created us to be.

And yet, this isn't just about personal introspection. This passage also teaches us how to be community together. After all, we are created to live in relationship, and we are at our best when we are supported by loving community.

That seems to be what Jesus does here. He creates a safe space for honesty and does so with acceptance, not so that sins can be affirmed, but in order that people can feel safe making the changes that will make them and their community better. Jesus works within the understanding that affirmation and possibility are more likely to drive positive change than are accusation and punishment. And so, while saying to the woman "do not sin again" Jesus does so with love in his voice and having affirmed her worth.

So, the question for us becomes - are we willing to create communities of acceptance and transformation? Are we willing to create safe spaces for

ourselves and others to do the hard work of becoming better? Or are we so threatened by honesty, by a different way of being, by change - even when that change is for our benefit - that we will simply hold firm to our old ways and refuse to allow transformation to happen in us or in those around us?

This summer we have been singing together some of the songs we sing more often in worship and asking questions about what they say about God and about who we are. Today's song is a song that claims the importance of accepting each person into loving relationship...it is a song that acknowledges that human isn't something we simply are, but something we work to be and become...it is a song that reminds us that people have value both as they are and in the possibilities of who they are still becoming...it is a song that asks us to be open to being changed, to keep practicing with others the same acceptance that God has given us, to become renewed and transformed in to one body of Christ.

What would happen if we created safe spaces for all people?

How would we look different if we knew that we could be honest about the best and worst of who we are and still be loved?

How would our communities look different if this was the welcome given to all people?

What can we do to help this happen?

Friends, we are invited to be and to become safe spaces that together we might be transformed. Amen.