

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, March 22, 2026

“The Good News Is... Rooted in Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness”

Young at Heart Message

I don't know about you, but today's Gospel reading leaves me with a couple of questions.

So, to help us think about this story in a new way, I want to imagine the story for us a little differently.

This portion of the sermon is adapted from a Children's sermon published on Gary Neal Hansen's website, *GaryNealHansen.com*.

He does give permission for this to be used broadly with credit to his page.

One night, Jesus and his friends had camped out on the Mount of Olives. The next morning, Jesus got up and said. “I'm going for a walk. See you later.”

“Where are you going?” they asked.

“To the Temple,” he said.

When Jesus got near the Temple doors, people crowded around him. So he started teaching them about the Kingdom of God, as Jesus tended to do when he was at the Temple.

But then a noisy group of men came down the road. When they got closer everybody moved out of their way.

Jesus noticed that they were bringing a woman with them, holding her tightly by the arms. She looked really upset, like she wanted to get away.

“Jesus!” said the man leading the group. “We were hoping to find you here. We brought this... this *woman!*”

“I see that,” Jesus said. He tried to catch the woman's eye, but she wouldn't look at him. She just looked at the ground.

Jesus got down on his knees and started writing something in the dirt. She was looking down, so she could see him writing.

“Well?” said the man. “*We caught this woman!*”

Jesus didn't look up. As he kept on writing, he said, "Well maybe you should let her go. I think you are hurting her arms."

The woman couldn't quite see what he was writing, but she was curious and kept trying to see more clearly.

The men eventually let the woman go. They gave her a shove, so she stood between Jesus and their group.

"I said," the man went on, "we caught her with the man who lives next door to her. They were doing something God's law forbids. The Law of God says we should kill her by throwing rocks at her. That's what we are gonna do!"

Jesus said, "You said she was with the man who lives next door to her. Where is *he*?"

The men shrugged and looked at their feet.

"Well, he's a friend of some of the guys here," said the leader. "But this woman is guilty. We caught her."

"Yeah, you mentioned that," said Jesus. "Seems like you only want to obey God if the person you punish is not a friend."

Nobody spoke.

"So did you bring the rocks?" Jesus asked.

The men looked at each other and shrugged. Their leader said, "No. We, um..."

Jesus interrupted. "Well if you're going to do what that law says, you're going to need rocks. It seems like you are wanting me to do it for you. Why don't you go away and come back when you're really ready."

All the men shuffled off. But someone shouted "We'll be back!"

And Jesus got back on his knees and started writing, slowly, in the dirt again. The woman watched him write, mesmerized and wondering.

The woman said "Are you going to let them throw rocks at me?" He didn't speak. She started to cry.

Then he said "Maybe they won't come back. But tell me: did you do what they said you did?"

She sniffled, but before she could answer, the men returned, with big rocks in their hands. “We’re back!” the leader said. “And we’re ready to do what God’s law says we should do!”

Jesus stood up, dusted himself off.

He said, “I’m afraid you will have to wait a minute. I’ve got a question for you. Is this maybe the first time you’ve tried to obey God’s law?”

“Why do you ask?” said the leader.

“Because it sounds like maybe you’re new at this,” Jesus said. “Anyway, we need to make sure you’re the right people to obey this particular law.”

“Oh come on,” said the leader. “Everyone should always obey God’s law. And we never broke the law *she* broke.”

“Think about it,” said Jesus. “If you knew someone stole a lot of money—say he’d already been convicted in court—would you let him decide who gets arrested for stealing?”

“What does this have to do with us?” said the leader. “It’s time for us to stone this sinful woman.”

Jesus stood up again. The woman tried so hard to see what he’d been writing. She tried to look subtle, but couldn’t quite see it.

Jesus dusted himself off once more. He said. “Okay, how about you arrange yourselves in three groups. If you’ve *broken a whole lot of God’s laws*, make a group over there.

If maybe you *used to break God’s laws* but you *don’t do it much any more*, stand in the middle. And if you always *try* to be good and *hardly ever break God’s laws*, make a group right over here.”

They grumbled, but they did it. They made three groups. Then Jesus said, “Okay, so now let’s go one at a time. Whoever here has *never ever broken even one* of God’s laws, that person gets to go first.”

The group close by all looked at each other. But nobody stepped forward.

So Jesus started writing in the dirt again.

One by one, the men drifted away. They dropped their rocks by the roadside and they left.

Eventually he looked up and caught the woman's eye. "Oh, so isn't anyone going to stone you after all?"

"No sir," she said.

"Well," Jesus said, "I'm certainly not going to."

"But..." said the woman. "What should I do now?"
She was holding her face in her hands and weeping.

"My daughter," Jesus said. "Go and live your life—But from now on, live the way God teaches you to live."

The woman nodded tearfully. With her path clear of men surrounding her, she could finally see what Jesus had written:



The Message

While that story is a reimagining of many of the details that are left out of the Gospel, it does help highlight some of the questions that we might have as we read this passage.

The first, and perhaps most important, is *who is considered guilty of sin*.

When these men brought the woman to Jesus, they said, "this woman was caught sleeping with a man who isn't her husband."

This naturally implies that another party was involved in the “transgression.” So why only bring one of the people who broke the Law of Moses rather than both?

This would be like if they brought the woman to Jesus and said, “this woman was caught robbing the local bank with a man who lives in town.”

Why would they only bring her, and not him as well? Shouldn't they both technically be stoned for breaking the law, if that is the required punishment?

The second question, of course, is what was Jesus writing in the dirt? And why was he doing this?

The Bible doesn't actually tell us, which has led to many different interpretations and speculations over the years.

But it's an intriguing question – was this akin to Jesus texting on his phone instead of engaging directly with the accusers of this woman?

Almost as though he intended to seem distracted so as to diffuse the situation and make it clear that he was not going to get worked up like they hoped he would?

We won't ever know for sure.

It's certainly easier to speculate as to why only the woman was brought to Jesus and not the man. That we can guess simply based on how women were treated at the time verses how men were treated.

But even today – do we find it more problematic when women commit adultery, or men?

I am sure we'd get a lot of different answers to that question if we asked different people, but I think often the initial reaction of most people would be to feel more upset about a woman than a man.

But speculating about what Jesus was writing is much more difficult.

And, it's largely unimportant for our purposes.

What IS important is finding the Good News in this passage.

We see Jesus offer tremendous compassion to this woman. Jesus is not immune to the cultural norms of his time so he could have easily gotten swept up in the anger of the men who brought the woman to him.

But he didn't. He saw a woman in front of him with all the complexities of humanity – no different than anyone else standing before him.

Who knows why this woman was with a man she wasn't married to? Maybe she was abused at home, maybe her husband died, maybe she was being blackmailed, maybe she didn't have a husband at all.

Jesus doesn't assume one thing or another. He simply sees her for who she is and meets her where she's at.

And, he does the same for the crowd.

He offers compassion by demonstrating for them what compassion can look like.

And he also offers compassion while also teaching them something.

We have to be careful here not to imply that the Law of Moses isn't important or that Jesus is superseding it somehow because that's not the case.

What he is doing is showing them that they are equally as guilty of breaking the law.

Maybe they haven't committed adultery, but adultery isn't the only thing they could do to break the law.

His point is that they have all broken the Law of Moses at some point.

So who are they to accuse someone else when they are equally as guilty?

In other words, if stoning is the punishment for breaking the law, then go ahead and throw stones as long as you are completely innocent yourself.

The men in the crowd, humbled by Jesus's words, realized that they are no less guilty than she.

And yet, Jesus offered compassion and forgiveness to *everyone*. He didn't argue that they should *all* be stoned.

And the Good News here is that Jesus offers that same level of compassion and forgiveness to all of us.

Yes, Jesus also encourages the woman to live the way God teaches us to live, and if the men were still around I am sure he would have said the same to them.

And, likely, to us too.

But Jesus suggests this out of love and compassion for the humanity in each of us.

And this is the beauty of this passage.

There is no need for guilt or shame, because we are wholly loved, cared for, and forgiven.

So, may you leave here today knowing this Good News.

May you allow Jesus to show you compassion, and may you show others that same compassion, each and every day. Amen.

Let us pray:

Merciful God, thank you for your loving kindness and compassion. Thank you for meeting us where we are. Thank you for forgiving us and understanding that our humanity and the complexities of life in community make us vulnerable. Thank you for sending your son Jesus Christ to show us a better way. Continue to walk with us and guide us and help us see your love all around us. Amen.