

John 8:1-11 Ash Wednesday St M & AA Audio Service 17/2/21



May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

As we begin our Lenten observances I would like to draw our attention to something important in this passage from John's Gospel and as the Australian theologian and Bible scholar, John Painter, says is critical and yet can be so easily missed: 'The pronouncement of forgiveness is stated first and is not made conditional on the turn from sin. Rather, the turning from sin seems to flow from the experience of forgiveness.'

It is often said that it is easier to give than to receive. I have to admit that I find it easier to forgive than to believe myself forgiven, silly really when we are encouraged to bring to Jesus any unresolved conflict or hurt in our lives remembering daily "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us."

This Gospel story reminds us that people are different in themselves and approach things in diverse ways and the people who came to Jesus in our Gospel story, with very different mind-sets, reflect this. The Pharisees and scribes were sure they were right and the woman knew that she had done wrong. The effect of meeting Jesus and letting Him into their lives changes them powerfully. The Pharisees and scribes, through the words of Jesus were able to see that they too were sinners, like the woman they were accusing and they were not perfect. The woman, expecting to be punished for her error, received a lovely acceptance from Jesus which must have left a lasting impression on her.

A meeting with Jesus is always a life changing and life-giving experience, as he himself said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". We have all sinned. We have all experienced overwhelming shame. Even if the sin is not discovered, our own self-accusatory voice can be so loud in our head

that it drowns out the gentle voice of Jesus, telling us to begin again. Yet if we cannot believe ourselves forgiven, how will we ever be able to move out of what the philosopher Ivan Illich describes as “our self-imposed cages”?

As the people in our Gospel reflected on their lives and realised their need for forgiveness, they turned and went away. As I reflect on my life and consider my need for forgiveness I realise that I need to draw closer to Jesus, who loves me. We all need to hear the words of Jesus speaking to us - not condemning us, but giving us a new mission and a new vision of our self. What Jesus said to the woman he says to you and me, 'I don't condemn you. Go on your way and don't sin.' You and I are before Jesus, not condemned but being sent on our way, loved and trusted.

Today we accept our Lenten walk with Christ to the Cross and offer Lenten observances by either giving something up or taking something on in memory of Christ giving up his life for us. For many of us there will again be that voice saying ‘why bother I always fail’. Therefore I leave you with the words of John Sullivan an Irish Jesuit with which he addressed participants on a retreat; ‘Be always beginning. Let the past go. The saints were always beginning. That is how they became saints.’

Amen.