

Contexts

John's Gospel – in brief

- **Structure of John's Gospel**

1:1-18: Prologue – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.

1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs: the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.

Chapter 6 – Jesus, the Bread of Life is right in the middle of The Book of Signs – a central text in more ways than one!

13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory: To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.

21:1-25: Epilogue: Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.

- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)
- Jesus is 'The Bread of Life' who feeds, nourishes and sustains the children of God.

John 8:1-11 – things to notice

- This story may have originally been part of Luke's Gospel. Not inserted into John's Gospel until 3rd Century CE. Follows more closely Luke's pattern of the forgiving Jesus (Lk 7:36-50; 8:2-3). Note also that the opening phrase (Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives) closely resembles Luke 21:37. Scholars think, therefore, that this story is a piece of the special Lukan tradition (to which the parable of the Forgiving Father, etc) belongs. How and why it disappeared from Luke, no one seems to know.
- The story is in three acts:
 1. accusation by the scribes and Pharisees
 2. Jesus' dialogue with them
 3. Jesus' dialogue with the woman
- "Mt of Olives" provides a link to Jesus' passion
- Jesus appeared in the Temple **again** to teach – suggests this is a daily activity by Jesus
- There is a sense of cruelty in the way they bring in the woman and make her stand 'in full view of everybody' causing public shame to her.
- Not the lack of the male also involved in the adultery – but remember, we are not dealing with an historical account of the event, we are dealing with a parable-like story in which not every detail is covered.
- Jesus does not contest the woman's guilt – there is no indication that she has been falsely accused.
- Scribes & Pharisees say to Jesus: the Law says this; what do you say?
- They are trying to trap Jesus into saying something they can use against him.
- Note the hypocrisy in trying to use the woman to trap Jesus.

- Jesus says nothing but bends down (making himself lower than the scribes & Pharisees and the woman) and writes on the ground – what he writes or why we do not know.
- They ask him a second time, perhaps growing impatient with Jesus’ lack of response.
- From his ‘sitting’ position Jesus looks up at them.
- Jesus replies: “Let the one without sin be the first to throw a stone at her”.
- Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again.
- One by one they go away, beginning with the eldest – why beginning with the eldest?
- Note that what Jesus says in fact begins to restore the scribes and Pharisees to right relationship with God and with the women. What they were so intent on doing to her fades away. Confronted by the words of Jesus they are transformed from self-righteous, punishment-seeking men to humble, peaceful men who melt away.
- Again, from his ‘sitting’ position he looks up, notices that he and the woman are alone (but are they? or is it just that the accusers have left?)
- Why does the woman stay there when her accusers have left?
- “Neither do I condemn you” – Jesus makes it clear that he is not one of her accusers despite what she has done. He treats the woman with compassion.
- “Go away and don’t sin anymore” – Jesus ‘releases’ the woman, she is free to go, but not to sin – a call to a new way of life?

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

Temptation, Transfiguration, Repentance & Forgiveness & Lent (3)

Today we come to the end of the Lenten Gospels. Next Sunday we listen to the Passion and begin our Holy Week.

Many wonder at the choice of the story of the woman caught in adultery for the Gospel this weekend.

This moving story completes our Lenten reflection on the mystery of God’s love and forgiveness.

1. Sunday 1: Temptation
2. Sunday 2: Transfiguration
3. Sunday 3: God does not punish sin with disaster but patiently works with us so that we will bear fruit through repentance (conversion/metanoia: change of heart)
4. Sunday 4: God welcomes us home, back to the family with lavish forgiveness and mercy, rejoices over us, does not count our sin against us, restores us to our rightful (proper) place in his family (that is, as a beloved son or daughter)
5. Sunday 5: God’s compassion and forgiveness become real in the concrete encounter between Jesus and the woman. God does not condemn and neither does Jesus, but he releases and frees us to live a new life. But the scribes and Pharisees are also released from judgemental and vindictive ways.

Last Sunday Jesus told a story about God’s lavish forgiveness. This Sunday he makes that story real in his own life and in the life of the woman brought to him.

This Sunday's Gospel proclaims that those who bear God's Spirit treat each other with the same lavish forgiveness that God treats us. Jesus is the image of such a person - one who shares with others the lavish forgiveness of God.

Last Sunday was a parable **about** God's forgiveness; this Sunday we see that lavish forgiveness at work in the **concrete human circumstances** of this woman and Jesus' ministry to her - God's **forgiveness in action** in the person of Jesus.

Over these Lenten weeks the Gospels have taught us that: the Christian life is a journey from temptation to transfiguration; from a divided heart to being 'shot through with' the Spirit of God.

This journey is accomplished through repentance (turning again towards God who patiently nurtures us to produce the 'good fruit') and by opening ourselves to God's lavish forgiveness, healing and restoration.

Those who are 'shot through with' the Spirit of God proclaim forgiveness, transcend jealousy and self-righteousness and call each other to turn again with confidence towards the Lord.

We are called, not to be judges over others, but practitioners of God's compassion.

With our hearts softened by our own experience of God's compassion and mercy and the realisation that we must become compassion in concrete human circumstances we are now ready to celebrate the paschal mystery with hearts and minds in the right place.

That's what the Lenten journey has been all about.