

Devotional by:

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Our Scripture today:

John 7: 53-8:11

The Message:

The Bible never ceases to confound me. Every time I start to think I have something figured out, I find a different perspective jumping out at me from around a corner.

When I read it from front to back, I find myself starting to think I've got everything all figured out about the time I hit the end of the Old Testament. Love God. Do what God says. That's it. I mean, Deuteronomy 6:5 is one of my life verses! I thought for a long time that's what most of Christianity really boiled down to. Simple, straight forward, pocket sized logic.

I grew up in a conservative Pentecostal household, we prayed together every day, several times a day. Before meals, before drives, before bed, before school, after school, before and after pretty much anything you can think of, and it was a great thing!

The Message:

I always knew that whatever happened that God and Gods laws always came first in my house, and that was enough. My dad is a pastor, as most of you know, this meant that I have been surrounded by a faith community for literally the entirety of my life. I have been privy to some of the most profoundly beautiful expressions of faith and community because of it, I've also gotten to see uglier sides of church folk.

When I went through my time of rebellion and wanderings in my late teens and early 20s, perhaps my biggest complaint with Christians was how often I saw faith used as a means of justifying some of the most selfish and judgmental behavior I've ever seen. Standing in protest lines screaming murderer at young women... because we love God. Praying the gay away... because we love God. Snubbing people who don't love God... because we love god. I'm pretty sure we can all come up with a personal example of at least one time we have been condemned by someone who "loves god".

In the scripture today, the scribes and Pharisees would definitely tell you that they love God. In fact, they love God so much that they are prepared to kill this woman because she did something that God doesn't like. So, thinking themselves terribly clever, they bring her to Jesus, wanting to trap him.

The Message:

To help put this into some context, the Jews were not legally allowed to put anyone to death at this time without approval from Roman authorities (see John 18:30-31). I have always thought the trap they set for Jesus was that if he did not condemn the woman to die, they could dismiss him as a false teacher who didn't follow God's law. If, however, he did condemn her, they would report him to the Romans and have him arrested for breaking Roman law. Terribly clever. But wait! My man Jesus has everything under control, as usual. He reminds them that loving God does not put you in the seat of judgment over your neighbor. We get to watch as this realization came home for each of them, and they leave. In the end not a single one doubled down on their scheme. They left the woman at the feet of Jesus, at the feet of the judge, and he did not condemn her.

While the first thing I see when I read this story is that no one is perfect, I think one of the quieter lessons is that God's love is perfect. No matter what you do, what you say, or who you are, God's love is not designed to condemn you. It's designed to free you. Jesus shows the woman in this story that she is valuable. She's not valuable because she has anything to offer, but because she is loved by God.

The Message:

I like to think that God loves all of us.

So, if nobody has told you yet today, you are valuable. You are loved. The next step is to show that love to every person you come across because they are valuable and loved too. If you find reason to condemn or hate someone, start with love, and leave the rest of it at the feet of the judge.