



RBC CONNECT GROUP STUDY FOR WEEK 4/10/20

"The Art of Stone Throwing"

I don't know about you, but during this most recent time of lockdown the stone throwers seem to have come out in force, hurling stones at all and sundry irrespective of the damage caused or even the rightness of the action.

The Free Dictionary defines stone throwing as "hurling insults or criticisms (at someone or something)."

Every day we seem to hear insults and criticisms thrown around willy-nilly.

In addressing this in today's study, I want to draw you to my favourite story from the life of Jesus.

John 8:1-11 (New Living Translation)

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, ² but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. ³ As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. ⁴ "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" ⁶ They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" ⁸ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. ⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" ¹¹ "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Some things we DON'T know from the text.

- a) How the woman was caught out (the Pharisees brought her to Jesus)
- b) Where was the man the woman was with?
- c) What Jesus wrote (twice) in the dust.
- d) We do not know what happened to the woman after this encounter with Jesus.

Over the years many explanations have been suggested as to what Jesus did write. I was told long ago that nothing can be argued from the silences or non-disclosures of Scripture.

- 1) However, for the sake of an exercise, what do you think Jesus could have written in the dust?

So, the woman is brought to Jesus.

- 2) Do you think their intent was honourable i.e. were they really interested in the fulfilment of the law?
- 3) How did they view the woman?
- 4) Was she being used by the Pharisees?

On numerous occasions Jesus was condemned by the Pharisees.

a) Matthew 9:1-3,

Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. ² Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." ³ At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

b) Mark 2:5-7,

⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

These Pharisees were very righteous, pious, maybe even holy. Well versed in the requirements of the Law, faithful in tithing and zealous in holding others to account for the observance of the Law. They were quite correct in their interpretation of the Law. The woman should be stoned to death for her sin.

5) What is so brilliant about Jesus' challenge to them to throw the first stone?

6) What was the bind Jesus had put them in?

For anyone of these Pharisees to pluck up the courage and throw the first stone they would be condemning themselves and declaring that they were sinless...in fact, they would be saying that they were, in fact, God (Yahweh).

7) When we are tempted to insult and criticise others (whether that be other Christians, people in our community or even our politicians) what should we remember in light of this episode from the ministry of Jesus?

Prayer:

Lord, we cast stones, sometimes. We hurt others with stones - literal and figurative - that we hurl without thinking. When someone says something that bothers us, we cover our ears, and shut them out. We block those with whom we disagree, challenging them, cutting them down, disregarding them. We want others to conform to our standards, not caring if they are good and faith-centred standards or not. We challenge and push aside those who seem different from us. We cast stones, loving God, and we are sorry. Please forgive us. Lord and help us to follow the example of Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen

PS. The photo at the top of this study is of a superb sculpture of this bible story. It is in the grounds of the Crystal Cathedral in California. A truly magnificent work capturing the facial expressions of the cast of players in wonderful and touching detail. I saw it in 1993 while on a ministry trip to the US.