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## Stories of Solidarity :: A Line in the Sand

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It seemed no matter how they tried to trap Jesus, he always managed to weasel out of being embarrassed in front of the crowds.

Attempts by these students and teachers of the Law to expose his heretical teachings most often failed miserably. Nearly every time, he would turn their own traditionally accepted interpretation of the Law against them, and public support of this revolutionary rabbi and his gospel of grace continued to rapidly grow.

This time would be different. He would have to draw a line in the sand.

They caught her *in the act* of adultery. They'd paint a picture of her as a home wrecker, the seductress of a married man - a man whom the teachers of the Law knew well. He regularly brought his tithes and offerings into the Temple, and was a gentleman in good standing within the religious community.

No one could believe that he had taken advantage of the young girl - even though that's what she kept saying.

*She was terrified.*

Her tears tugged at the thin thread of compassion present even in these teachers of the Law, but to no avail.

The Law permitted a stoning. In fact, even *demand*ed it.

And just as their married friend had used her body for his pleasure, they would use her very life to trap this liberal Galilean and turn the crowd against his teachings of the good news of grace.

They threw her down into the dirt directly in front of Jesus in middle of the Temple, interrupting the Savior's sermon.

All eyes were on the Great Teacher.

The girl was crying and whimpering, each breath shorter than the last. The men were smirking, knowing despite the emotional capital demanded by their decision to drag her into the inner court unclothed, the letter of the Law demanded more than mere compassion. It dictated 'justice.' A sacrifice.

This time they'd trapped Jesus within the boundaries of the Law. They needn't ask what it was that the Law stated. *The lines of this box were clear.* The woman's life didn't matter. She was an adulteress. She was guilty. She deserved death.

*'The Scripture clearly states that she should pay with her life, Jesus. What do you say?'*

The God-man stopped preaching and instead got onto the ground next to the woman, posturing himself in proximity to this sinner without responding to the queries of the qualified.

They kept pestering, rocks in hand, ready for his response.

*'Well, what do you say? Can we stone her or not?!?!'*

Their question was not one of permission, but of partition.

These leaders knew according to the Law of Moses, they could - and should - stone her with a clear conscience. That wasn't the question. The question was, would Jesus approve of her stoning? Or would he once again overturn the Law in favor of his gospel of grace?

They wanted Jesus to draw a clear line - a boundary - between 'us' and 'them.' Between the

sacred and the profane. The good and the bad. Those that deserved death and those that did the killing in the name of God.

*They wanted Jesus to draw a line in the sand.*

They had hoped that this predicament would expose his publicly and privately professed allegiance to the Scriptures, and therefore stop the crowds from following him. 'In' versus 'out' was the very same gospel they themselves were preaching in the synagogues.

Instead, Jesus flipped the Law on its head. They should have seen it coming.

He drew in the dirt with his finger. A line. The disciples looked on it utter amazement as their teacher took what Moses had written in stone and wrote a new law on the spirit-led, breeze-blown shifting sands of the Temple flooring.

Jesus stood and addressed the scribes :

Covering the young woman with his own cloak, he said, *'Whichever of you has no sin, throw the first stone. Let her have it.'*

Jesus then knelt in solidarity on the ground next to her, directly in the line of fire. He reinforced the line in the sand with his fingers as the crowd watched, awaiting the response of the elders. If any would be so bold as to cast their rocks of condemnation at the girl, they would have to hit this Master Teacher, too.

The most seasoned scribe realized it first. Jesus wasn't going to leave her side, even if it cost him his life. He had chosen the side of the sinner, and had done so in broad daylight. Publicly. The elder dismissively dropped his rock and turned around to walk away. The others, one by one, followed.

The young woman's breathing had soon slowed down, her tears now falling from a self-taught guilt and self-imposed shame, rather than fear.

She looked at Jesus, whose gentle hands were helping her stand to her feet.

*'Woman, where did they all go? Didn't anyone condemn you?'*

*'No one did, Lord.'*

*'Me neither.'*

**<But what about the 'Go and sin no more?'\>**

Often we quote Jesus' last words to the woman - 'Go and sin no more,' and use this phrase as an opportunity to pounce upon the person with whom we disagree.

Here's the kicker, though - Jesus only uttered these words after two *very* significant things took place. First, he risked his *reputation*. As a Rabbi interrupted halfway through a sermon, by Jesus stopping the stoning of this woman caught in the act of adultery he essentially allows compassion, mercy and love to have the final authoritative word - *even over the authority of the Scriptures*. He was indeed teaching a new way - and it could have (and ultimately did) cost him his life. He stood alongside her, risking his reputation by being seen as *with* and *for* her. By standing (or in this case, *stooping*) in solidarity with the woman, he readied himself to accept whatever punishment she received as his own.

Second, by choosing to kneel with and for the woman at his own invitation for those 'without sin' to cast the first stone, Jesus put his own physical safety - even his own life - in danger. Talk about 'street cred.' His purposeful proximity in solidarity with the woman is an important point of the story.

Equally important, before 'sharing the truth in love,' Jesus made certain the woman knew he did not condemn her. *'Where are they? Didn't anybody stay to condemn you?!?'* And here's the

punch-line, and the point of this passage : *'Neither do I. From now on sin no more.'* In this way, Jesus 'earned the right' so to speak, to utter that phrase to the woman under the blanket of grace and an unmistakable, vocal and public response of non-condemnation.

It's also interesting to note (lest we lose ourselves in an impossible standard of morality) that the young woman - if she's like any of us - could *not* have possibly stopped sinning. This request from the Master Teacher isn't even possible. He didn't call out her specific sin, and it's likely that she messed up and missed the mark, even after this life-changing encounter with Christ. Because of that, it seems his words of 'go and sin no more' aren't the point of this passage; rather, the crux of this particular section of scripture is Jesus being willing to stand against the oppressors alongside the oppressed, even when she'd been caught red-handed 'in the act' of sin.

*What about us? Where do we draw our lines in the sand?*