Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Has no one condemned you?” (John 8:11).

Dan 13:43c-62; John 8:1-11

By matching the story of Susanna in the garden in Daniel 13 with the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery in John 8, the Lectionary suggests that the first story inspired the second. Jesus, like the boy Daniel, has the wisdom to confound the scribes and Pharisees who use the woman to trap him into either following the Law of Moses or opposing it by saving her from stoning. The brutal insensitivity of their plot condemns these religious leaders in the same way the lust and lying of the elders condemns them in the Daniel account.

Scholars suggest that the highly charged story in John 8 was a later addition to the Gospel. It is like another story in the synoptics in which agents of the religious authorities and Herodians try to trap Jesus with hostile questioning about whether to pay Roman taxes. Again, like the boy Daniel, Jesus shows shrewd judgment in turning the trap on his interlocutors by showing first that they possess the Roman coin, then telling them to give to Caesar what is his, but to God what is God’s, which is everything.

Commentaries speculate that if the adulterous woman story were an actual incident, it could have occurred during the feast of Tabernacles, when people lived in tents to

commemorate the hut Jonah lived in while awaiting the destruction of Nineveh. The surprise exposure of a couple in the act by the religious officials and the capture of the woman but not the man strongly suggests a set-up designed to confront Jesus. His refusal to judge the woman but to make the accusers judge themselves is a brilliant response. The crowd disperses in shame. Jesus preserves justice by telling the woman to sin no more, but he also exhibits mercy by saving her life and refusing to condemn her.

Presenting these stories the week before Palm Sunday and Holy Week increases our sense of the growing hostility against Jesus and the extent to which his enemies are willing to go to find cause to condemn him. They attack him for being merciful, putting compassion before legalism, reaching out to untouchables and eating with sinners. Each charge only enhances Jesus' stature and makes his crucifixion all the more inexplicable. This may be the reason the story was inserted into the fourth Gospel.

Today's media concentration and public interest in sexual abuse and harassment of women highlights both an important social issue and the level of attention on personal information and private details sexual issues attract. This mirrors the blood lust mentality of the incident Jesus was drawn into. His response proclaimed human dignity and gender equality in a way that brings mercy and justice together in the Gospel for all time, every place and generation.

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