Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Let the one among you who is without sin cast the first stone at her” (John 8:8).

Dn 13:41c-62; *Jn 8:1-11*

To interest my high school students into opening their Bibles, I gave them a list of required readings, but added a second list they were not supposed to read. Needless to say, all of them found and read the story of Susanna in the garden.

This dramatic and lurid account of the lustful judges who surprised a naked woman in her bath and demanded sex with her was so well known that the evangelist inserts into his Gospel a somewhat parallel story about Jesus, whose wisdom, like that of the boy Daniel, saves a woman accused of adultery from being stoned to death.

Daniel cross-examines the evil judges and trips them up. Jesus shames the woman's accusers by catching them in their own self-righteous trap.

Both scenes, like all lynchings, are lust-driven. Jesus' opponents, who just happened to be there when the woman and her lover were having sex, catch her, not him, and drag her before Jesus and a large gathering of men (only men could stone someone). If he lets her go, he breaks the Law of Moses; if he assents to her execution, his message of mercy and forgiveness is destroyed in the eyes of the people.

Jesus does neither, but instead puts the dilemma to the accusers. Stone this woman, but only if you are yourself without sin. Blood lust drains from the crowd as each man considers his own faults, and, beginning with the eldest, they slip away in shame.

Two women are saved, Susannah and the unnamed woman before Jesus. But there is a difference. One was innocent, while the other, together with her paramour, were not. Adultery is no small matter. Yet Jesus sends her away with only a warning, not condemnation, knowing the suffering and humiliation she has already suffered. Such is the real price of sin, which unleashes chaos into our lives.

Justice is there, and so is overwhelming mercy and compassion. This is the joy of the Gospel. How blessed we are to have Jesus watching over us, sinners and innocent alike.