CAUGHT IN THE ACT

John Wesley was a popular evangelist in early America and often rode from one church to another to preach. On one such journey, stopped by a highwayman who shouted, "Halt, your money or your life." Wesley got down from his horse, emptied his pockets to reveal only a handful of coins. He even invited the robber to search his saddlebags - which only carried his books. In disgust, the thief was turning away when John Wesley cried "Stop, I have something more to give you." Puzzled, the robber turned back. Wesley then leaned towards him and said "My friend, you may live to regret this sort of life in which you are engaged. If you ever do, I beg you to remember this: 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanses us from all sin.'" The robber hurried silently away, but Wesley got back on his horse & rode on his way praying in his heart that the word might be fixed in the robber's conscience.

Years later, at the close of a Sunday evening service, a stranger stepped forward and earnestly begged to speak with John Wesley. Wesley recognized him as the robber who had stolen from him so long before, but now he was a well to do tradesman and better still, a child of God. Raising Wesley's hand to his lips he affectionately kissed it and sad in deep emotion, "To you, dear sir, I owe it all."

Wesley replied softly, "No, no my friend, not to me, but to the precious blood of Jesus Christ which cleanses us from all sin."

John 8:2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

1. Jesus STOPPED – He sat to receive the searching (vs. 2)

This story starts out with Jesus once again surrounded by people who wanted to hear him. At dawn he was there again in the temple area sitting down and making himself available to all who were willing to learn from Him. The day before had been the end of the Feast of Tabernacles – a weeklong celebration in which people would live in temporary shelters to remember God's provision for them during the 40 years in the wilderness. On the last day of the feast water would be poured out to remember God's provision of water from the rock.

John 7:37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Jesus is saying here that He is God's provision. He had come to give himself for mankind to get them through the barren wilderness of sin and death and into the promised land of eternal life.

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty… 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

Jesus is invites each one of us into His presence today. The invitation and the gift He offers to us is life and peace and rest. The invitation is for everyone.

Matt 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

One stormy night many years ago a couple entered the lobby of a small hotel in Philadelphia and asked for a room. The clerk explained that because there were three conventions in town, the hotel was filled. "But I can't send a nice couple like you out in the rain at 1 o'clock in the morning," he said. "Would you be willing to sleep in my room?" The couple hesitated, but the clerk insisted. The next morning when the man paid his bill, he said, "You're the kind of manager who should be the boss of the best hotel in the United States. Maybe someday I'll build one for you." The clerk smiled, amused by the older man's "little joke." A few years passed. Then one day the clerk received a letter from the elderly man, recalling that stormy night, and asking him to come to New York for a visit. A round-trip ticket was enclosed. When the clerk arrived, his host met him and took him to the corner of 5th Avenue and 34th Street, where stood a magnificent new building. "That," explained the man, "is the hotel I have just built for you to manage." "You must be joking," said the clerk. "I most assuredly am not," came the reply. "Who -- who are you?" stammered the other. "My name is William Waldorf Astor." That hotel was the Waldorf-Astoria, and the clerk was George C. Boldt.

We see in the gospels that Jesus always made the time to spend with those who were truly seeking Him. He went out of His way to stop and meet the needs of others. Likewise, Jesus wants to meet with you today if you will only call out to Him.

Matt 20:30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

It says here that Jesus STOPPED. What do you want Jesus to do for you today? He is here and passing by you right now. Like our text for this morning Jesus wants to meet with you. Cry out to Him and He will stop and sit with you as well.

2. Jesus STOOPED - He stooped to rebuke the skeptics (vs. 3-9)

As Jesus was teaching the people His class was interrupted by the Pharisees who wanted to trap him. They brought in a woman who had been caught "in the act" of adultery. She was caught red handed and there was no denying her guilt. You could ask the question how this woman had been caught in the act so early in the morning. You could also ask where the man was. It seems a little too convenient to be by chance. I think that this was probably a set up. It was part of a premeditated trap to get Jesus.

What the Pharisees were bringing to Jesus was an impossible choice. If He had mercy on the woman then the crowds would say He did not uphold the law and that He was unjust. If He upheld the law and let the woman be stoned then He would not be merciful. It is this same problem that has existed since the fall of mankind.

How does a loving God respond to the problem of human sin? In mercy He could not allow us to be condemned but in His justice He could not simply look the other way. God did what Jesus does here – He stooped.

The Son of God became man to enable men to become the sons of God. -- C S. Lewis

He clothed himself with our lowliness in order to invest us with his grandeur. -- Richardson Wright

The word used here for bent down is the Greek word KUPTO which means to stoop down. Instead of trying to argue the law with them or appease the accusers he responded by doing what He had already done through His birth many years before - He stooped down.

I know how this woman felt. I was dead in my sins when I met Jesus. I was guilty and there was no denying it. I was caught with my hand in the cookie jar. When I was still a sinner Jesus stooped down for me. The wages of sin was death but Jesus stooped down for me. He left His home in glory and came to the earth to die in my place – to take the eyes of the accusers off me and onto himself.

The Pharisees were using the law as the means to condemn this woman. That is unfortunately what many Christians do today with God's word. They use the words of Jesus to destroy. Here we see why the written words of Jesus were given, to free and forgive.

Why did Jesus write in the dirt? This is the only mention in the gospels of Jesus writing anything. It was not written on a parchment, so we needn't look for it in archeological digs. It wasn't carved into stone or wood, so it won't be found stashed away in some old church. The one time we know of Jesus writing, He did it with His finger, in the dust at his feet. It probably didn't make it through the day, before being scuffed out, either by Jesus Himself, or the people as they went to and from the temple.

What did Jesus write? Maybe He wrote out Proverbs 26:4 which says "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him." Maybe he wrote the name of the man the Pharisees had used to trap the woman. Maybe he began to write out a list of all the sins that he knew some of them were guilty of. Maybe He wrote down the names of some of the Pharisees girl friends. Maybe he was just doodling and trying to take the condemning eyes of the Pharisees off the vulnerable woman and onto himself. I don't know what he wrote.

For me the important thing is that his fingers wrote in the earth. The hand of a perfect God imprinted the lowly dirt. You and I are made of dirt. We were born from it and eventually will return to it. When I was dead in my sins Jesus touched me. He imprinted a message on me while I was still his enemy. That message changed my life forever. I don't know what Jesus wrote that day, perhaps it was a personal message to that woman. The word of God in each one of our lives has a personal touch that only we know. I know what Jesus wrote in my life – it might be different in yours.

A vicar had a dream. He was on his way to heaven. Before him there stretched a long flight of stairs. As he started to go up, he was given a piece of chalk and told that he must put a chalk mark on each of the steps for each sin he had committed. When he was about halfway up he met the bishop coming down. He enquired why his Lordship was returning, and the bishop answered, "I'm just going back to get some more chalk!" Perhaps we feel like that too!

3. Jesus SAVED – He stood to reach the sinner (vs. 10-11)

When pressed for an answer Jesus finally says "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." It is so easy to point your finger at the sin of another person without recognizing your own sin first.

Philip Yancey, in his book 'what's so amazing about grace?' comments that this incident illustrates that the world is not divided into righteous and unrighteous people but into sinners who admit that they are sinners and sinners who deny that they are sinners.

In Charles Schultz's cartoon, "Peanuts," Lucy is seen saying that if she was in charge of the world, she'd change everything. Charlie says, "That wouldn't be easy. Where would you start?" Lucy looks directly at him, and without hesitation, points her finger at him and says, "I'd start with you!" And so it is with those who live their lives pointing out your one fault while ignoring that they too live under grace to cover their faults.

Romans 2:1 You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

John Stott wrote of this verse - This is not a call to either suspend our critical facilities or to renounce all criticism and rebuke of others as illegitimate; rather it is a prohibition of standing in judgment of other people and condemning them, especially when we fail to condemn ourselves first.

Col 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

After given the people a moment to let this truth sink in and examine their own hearts everyone dropped their rocks and left. Jesus stayed and stood to reach out to the woman. He asked her a simple question, "has no one condemned you?" "No one", she said. Jesus responds "then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." There was only one person there who was able to forgive, only one without sin, and He did not condemn her.

Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

While Jesus did not condemn her, He also did not condone her sin. He offered this guilty woman, who deserved the death penalty for her crime, grace. He forgave her and challenged her to live a new life. Jesus meets you the same way this morning. He wants to be your Savior, but if you refuse to acknowledge your guilt and your need for his grace, then Jesus Christ also will become your judged.

Warren Wierbe tells about a frontier town where a horse bolted and ran away with a wagon carrying a little boy. Seeing the child in danger, a young man risked his life to catch the horse and stop the wagon. The child who was saved grew up to become a lawless man, and one day he stood before a judge to be sentenced for murder. The prisoner recognized the judge as the man who, years before, had saved his life. He pled for mercy on the basis of that experience. But the words from the bench silenced his plea: "Young man, then I was your savior; today I am your judge, and I must sentence you to be hanged."

Jesus is here with each one of us through His Holy Spirit today. How will you respond this message? Maybe you came today hungry and searching – Jesus wants to stop and sit with you. Accept His invitation to draw near.

Maybe you have come as a skeptic today with a critical and judgmental heart. God became a man for you. He stooped down from heaven to earth and gave up everything he had in order to touch you and set you free. Let the words he has written speak to your hearts today.

Maybe like this woman who was caught in the act, you know you have blown it. You have tried to live your life without God and have failed. He knows your heart. Jesus and we as a church are not interested in condemning you today. Jesus is standing beside you and offering you the chance to be forgiven and to start over. Accept Him today.

The choices we make do not simply affect us, they affect those around us. They influence those who follow us.

In 1877 there was a book published by Richard Dugdale who was involved in the prisons in New York. The book was about a man named Max Jukes who was born in 1740 and traced his family history over several generations. Max Jukes did not believe in Christ or in Christian training. He refused to take his children to church and would not permit them to go even when they asked. He has had 1,026 descendants; 300 were sent to prison, 27 were murderers, 190 were public prostitutes; 509 were either alcoholics or drug addicts. Dugdale was able to estimate that the Jukes family had cost the State of New York almost $1.4 million dollars to house, institutionalize and treat the family of deviants.

A few years latter another book was published about a great preacher and leader of the revival called Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards lived in the same city and state, at the same time as Jukes. He loved the Lord and saw that his children were in church every Sunday, as he served the Lord to the best of his ability. He has had 929 descendants, and of these 430 were pastors; 86 became university professors; 13 became university presidents; 75 authored Christian books; 30 were judges and 66 were doctors, 7 were elected to the United States Congress, 3 served as governors and one became vice president of the United States. His family never cost the state one cent but has contributed immeasurably to the life of plenty in this land today. Which family line would you like to see following you?