



They all went home, and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

John 7:53 - 8:11

'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'

Tuesday 3rd week in Lent

The story of the woman caught in adultery did not form part of the original gospel but was added at a later date. This creates ambivalence towards the story, ambivalence we feel because the story is one of the few in John to make any real claim on our emotional attachment. If we are honest with ourselves, it is probably true to say that only three stories in John lodge in our minds at the emotional level: the water into wine at Cana, this story, and the raising of Lazarus. In each of these stories, Jesus emerges more as a real human being. The story of the woman caught in adultery also takes us much closer to the picture of Jesus as portrayed in the synoptic gospels, especially the injunctions there not to judge others.

Whether or not the story is original, the message it conveys is powerful and enduringly relevant. The propensity of religious people to judge and condemn others is ever present. It has become especially powerful in our time as we have become aware of the extent to which male-dominated religious authorities project their most aggressive judgements against women.