

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3-12-2021



Dear Friends in Christ,

The two examples I previously gave about Jesus empowering the powerless (turn the other cheek and give your cloak as well as your tunic) are both from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus also includes going an extra mile to empower those who were forced to carry the equipment of a Roman soldier. This was legal but only for one mile. After that, the soldier could be punished, so if one kept carrying the equipment beyond one mile, the soldier would be at risk and would likely avoid forcing the person, and perhaps anyone, from doing this again. It can an interesting exercise to read the gospels and the rest of the Bible for that matter, from the perspective of power: who has it, who doesn't, and how power shifts in the stories. Jesus' efforts to empower the powerless was not just from that sermon in Matthew, but also demonstrated in His dealings with people. One of the best examples of Jesus doing that and a good story for looking at those power shifts is the woman caught in adultery in John 8.

When the Pharisees and teacher of the law bring the woman before Jesus, they have great power and the woman has none. She has been caught in an adulterous relationship and the law allows for her to be stoned. After all, we don't want to condone that kind of behavior. (It's also interesting that she alone is brought. What happened to the man in the relationship?) Once the situation is explained to

Jesus, they ask whether He is going to side with the law or with the woman. His answer will determine not just the fate of the woman, but also His own as He could lose popularity by calling for her death or stand in judgment for rejecting the law. Note, though, that the power has now shifted. Those religious leaders have transferred their power to Jesus as He gets to decide, and also given Him a bit more as He has to determine how He Himself will be perceived.

Jesus, after writing in the dirt for a few minutes transfers the power back to the leaders and gives them more than the initially had. He says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Once again, her fate rests with the leaders and the crowd following them, but not just the woman's. They also have to evaluate their own sinfulness and recognize that they must judge themselves if they are going to judge her.

This seems to be more power than they can handle because, one by one, they all walk away until only the woman remains. Now the power is back with Jesus because He still can condemn or condone her behavior. He asks where those who accused her, she replies that they have all left.

One more time the power shifts as Jesus first proclaims that He will not condemn her, but says one thing more. "Go now and leave your life of sin." Those words suddenly give power to the woman. She can choose how she will live her life. Jesus seems to know that she does not have to live in this type of relationship. (Some women had no choice but to give themselves away sexually to provide for their own existence, but Jesus' words suggest that she does not.) Now, though, Jesus names the power that she has to determine what her life will look like. Now, this woman who seemed to have no control at the beginning of the story can claim power over her reputation, her dignity, and her relationship with God.

There were many in Jesus' society who had little or no power. Those who did have it often abused it. It was Jesus' desire that all were able enabled to live with the empowerment that should come naturally to a person. More than that, Jesus wanted people to be empowered with the knowledge that they (and we) are dearly loved by God.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey