

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/27/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Several weeks ago, I had an online conversation with a friend who was focused on condemning the sins (of others). At one point, she said, “And we are to repent and turn from that sin. We are also called to help others out of their sin, not to leave them in it. I’m sure it was someone profound who said, ‘Go and sin no more!’” I replied, “Yes, it was, and before HE said that HE said, “Neither do I condemn you.”

These were references to the familiar story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8. According to the Law (the Old Testament), having been caught in the act of having relations with a man where at least one of them was married, they both should have been stoned to death. Now, there is no mention or explanation why it is only the woman who is brought before JESUS, no clarification of what happened to the man. And the religious leaders bring her to JESUS in order to trap HIM by asking HIM what should be done with her. If JESUS says to let her go, that would be a violation of the Hebrew Law of GOD. If HE says to stone her, HE would lose favor with the people who saw JESUS as their ally against the strict regulations of the Law as interpreted by these religious leaders. JESUS, however, turns the decision back on them based on their own behavior and says, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Of course, since all are sinful, they slowly turn and walk away, leaving only the woman and JESUS, who asks her, “Has no one condemned you?” After she replies that no one has remained and convicted her, JESUS replies, “Neither do I condemn you,” and then adds “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

There’s just so much here! So much that we can learn.

But with regard to my conversation with my friend in the context of this story from scripture, we, first, would do well not to place ourselves in a position of judging the sins of others. To be honest, we have enough to deal with on our own, so it is not our place to condemn others.

Second, we need to recognize that JESUS is not in the business of condemning sin, but forgiving it. JESUS does not begin with sin in HIS conversations with others, but with GOD’S love and mercy. We also should be extending that message to those we encounter, especially when we see them burdened with the guilt of their failures.

And third, we are to encourage others (and ourselves) to shed sinful behavior as a response to that grace extended by JESUS. JESUS’ words “Leave your life of sin,” or as some translations put it, “Sin no more,” (can you imagine?), is spoken by JESUS who knows that this woman has other options than this sinful conduct that has landed her in this situation. But it is also up to her, based on what she has received from JESUS.

Consider your own situation—your own life with its sinful behavior. Which do you want to want to hear first? “Leave your life of sin?” That would make it something we have to do first in order to receive GOD’S mercy, achieved only if we are successful at completely avoiding sin. Or would you rather hear first, “Neither do I condemn you?” Hearing those words coming from JESUS, do you feel a sense of relief and gratitude? It’s good if you do feel that, and having heard those words, JESUS

invites you to try to do your very best to “leave your life of sin.” But it’s your choice how you will do that.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey