



The Inclusive Community

Theological Worlds - 4

Guilt / Forgiveness

May 23 2010

Hosea 1:2-8 John 8:1-11

Homily of Rev. Dr. George H. McDonald

Good morning. My name is Naomi. This is my story of Jesus.

I was born in raised in Jerusalem, the daughter of one of the more influential citizens. My parents were involved in the social and political life of the city, and essentially, I was raised by our servants. Like many girls of that time, it was fated that when I reached the age, my father arranged for me to be married, in my case to another influential citizen, a much older man named Ibsan.

Ibsan was one of the 23 men in the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. But his goal was to serve on the Great Sanhedrin, the 71 men who served as judges over all Israel.

I looked forward to being married to Ibsan, for I had been a lonely child growing up. I longed for someone to love me, someone I could love deeply in return.

But such a dream was not to be. Ibsan stayed busy, meetings here, parties here. Occasionally I was the "sweet young thing," "the trophy wife" on his left arm. But those times were few and far between. And I yearned to love and be loved.

There were times when I called myself, Lo-ruhamah. Remember the story of the prophet Hosea, who married a prostitute named Gomer? They had three children, one of them a daughter. Hosea said that God told him to name her Lo-ruhamah, which means "not-pitied," because God would "no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them." Much of my life I felt as though no one cared about me. I wasn't sure how, but it was all my fault! Obviously, I wasn't loved because I was un-lovable!

Which brings me to Ehud, one of Ibsan's young friends. He was Ibsan's scribe. And he wrote beautiful poetry! One afternoon, he came to the house to see Ibsan. Since my husband wasn't home, I invited Ehud in to wait for him. We chatted amicably.

Ehud came more and more frequently, and always, it seemed, when Ibsan had not yet returned home. One thing led to another, and the inevitable happened.

One afternoon, when Ibsan was out of town, Ehud and I were alone in the garden, and ...Well! You know! Things got out of hand. I seduced him!

Afterward I felt so ashamed of myself. But I must confess that I enjoyed it, too. I was torn between guilt and desire. Like many in your society today, I was desperately reaching out for love, but I settled for sex instead. And Ehud continued to come "to visit Ibsan."

Early one morning, after Ibsan had long since left, Ehud and I were alone in the garden. Suddenly a group of men rushed in and grabbed me. Ehud escaped out the back gate. The mob grabbed me and pushed, pulled, dragged, shoved me, kicking and screaming, out of the house and down to the temple. They shouted and called me names, for all around to hear. Along the way, they picked up stones, and waved them, inviting the crowd to join them, as they rushed me down the street.

A man named Jesus was there in the temple, teaching. The mob, primarily religion scholars and Pharisees interrupted him. They shoved me to the ground there, in plain sight of everyone. I tried to cover myself with my torn clothes. One of the group's leaders said to Jesus, "Rabbi, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. In the law Moses, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" Looking back, they were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him, as well as getting me.

Jesus bent down and wrote in the dirt, trying to ignore them. But they kept after him, badgering him. He straightened up. "Okay!" He looked around the circle. "The one among you who is without sin." He pointed at them, "You?" "You?" "You?" "Who will be first? Come on now. Don't be bashful! Throw your stone!" Bending down again, he wrote again in the dirt.

Almost like that, the crowd went silent. I mean, not a sound! Only the sound of stones hitting the ground, as, one by one, beginning with the oldest, they each dropped their stone, and quietly walked away.

I was left alone with Jesus. Standing up, he asked me, "Did you do what they claim you did?"

"Yes, I did!" I nodded my head.

He looked around. "Then where are your accusers? Have they all gone away?"

"I don't see anyone, Sir."

"I do not condemn you, either," he said. "Go back home. From now on, do what is right."

I can't explain what happened next. But in Jesus' presence, I felt loved -- not only by Jesus, but also by God! I felt loved -- forgiven, accepted, redeemed from my empty, unlovely past. My entire future, a new future, stretched out before me.

Jesus bent down, took my hand, and gently helped me to my feet. With his dark, deep - sunk eyes, he looked deeply into my eyes, as though he were looking into my soul. "No longer will you be Lo-ruhamah. Not-pitied." -- he knew my secret name! "You have been redeemed. From now on, you shall be called Beloved-of-God! Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

"But first, I want you to turn around, very slowly."

I turned around, and there, kneeling in front of me was the leader of that righteous multitude, a

member of the Sanhedrin ---- Ibzan, my husband! He had come back while I was talking with Jesus.

He looked up at me, tears coursing down his cheeks. He choked through his sobs, "I would understand if you just walked away, and never spoke to me again. Please don't go. I am so ashamed, not just for today. Especially for today, but also for all the years I have used you, abused you, ignored you. Please forgive me! I am going to resign from the Sanhedrin, immediately, so I can be with you. I will try to be the husband you deserve. I know it won't make up for the years you have put up with me. But, Naomi, my beloved, I love you. Please come home with me."

Just as Jesus had reached down to me in love, and helped me to stand again, I reached down and took his hand. He stood up. We embraced, there in front of God and everybody.

And we kissed. Never in married life had Ibzan kissed me that way. Of course, I had never kissed him that way either. It was the kiss that would have left Wesley and Buttercup's kiss in the shade!

As we walked home, arm in arm, I asked him, "What did Jesus write in the dirt?"

"The only thing that could help me. He wrote, "And what part did you play in this tragedy?"

That's the other reason I am resigning from the Sanhedrin. You know, after I really looked at myself, I suddenly felt very unqualified to judge anyone else."

I looked at him, "Yeah, I know what that feels like! "

And through our tears, we laughed together, for the first, but definitely not the last time, in our life together. And it was almost as if we both heard God laughing too. "Isn't it wonderful to love and be loved? Isn't it wonderful to be God's beloved ones! And to share God's love with each other!" Amen.

Theological World Four

LIFE RHYTHM	Condemnation / Forgiveness
FEELS LIKE	guilt
SIN IS	inevitable, inescapable fact of existence
STATE of BEING	fugitive, rebel, diseased agent
ROLE OF CHRIST	A REDEEMER who takes away my guilt, and who forgives the unforgivable
IMAGE OF JESUS	"Jesus Christ, and him crucified"
SALVATION	being adopted as a child of God
SPIRITUALITY	rehearsing the story of my salvation
SCRIPTURE	Romans 8:15b-17, Psalm 32:1-5, Psalm 51:3-5
(a few examples)	
POSSIBLE REASON FOR JESUS GOING TO JERUSALEM TO DIE	Even those who believe they are "chief among sinners" can hear "Today, you will be with me in paradise!" or "There can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood."