

# S.P.A.C.E. for Lent Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## No Condemnation

Adultera ai piedi del Maestro



Antonio Tempèra (a contemporary artist) - downloaded from <http://www.joyfulheart.com/>

<sup>53</sup> Then they all went home,<sup>1</sup> but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>2</sup> At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered round him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup> and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’ <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ <sup>8</sup> Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’

<sup>11</sup> ‘No one, sir,’ she said.

‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’

*John 7:53-8:11*

The account of the woman taken in adultery has attracted the attention of many artists. Typically they will show Jesus, the woman and a crowd, including the angry and self-righteous accusers as well as the more contrite listeners who guiltily shuffle away when the force of Jesus' challenge strikes home to them. Tempèra ignores all the peripheral characters and leaves us to focus on what is taking place between the two principals. He shows Jesus leaning towards a woman kneeling at his feet, stretching out a hand to her in forgiveness and encouragement.

The woman is dressed in scarlet, reminding us of words from Isaiah:

*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (Isaiah 1:18)*

But Jesus, often depicted in white as befits one without sin, here in this painting is shown wearing a scarlet garment outside his familiar white clothes. Is Tempèra reminding us that Jesus was taking on the sins of all who turn to him, freeing them of the burden of guilt and condemnation?

This well-known passage is especially relevant today as we agonise over the way in which women are treated in our society. It is a reminder that Jesus disregarded the contemporary attitudes regarding women. Elsewhere we know that he treated them with courtesy and respect and was happy to flout convention in the way he related to them. Women were among his most faithful followers (Matthew 27:55-56; 28:1) and some even supported him financially (Luke 8:3).

But today's passage is about a wider issue. A mixed group of teachers of the Law and Pharisees, men of power and influence, saw this woman not so much as a person but more as a means of entrapping Jesus. She was merely the bait they used to trick a troublesome rabbi into making a choice between obeying the laws of Moses and obeying the laws of the Roman rulers. They were happy to expose her to the risk of being stoned to death, but not interested in punishing the other party in the adultery - the man who had left her on her own to face the consequences of their shared sin. And they certainly were not interested in encouraging her to live a better life in future.

Jesus saw straight through her accusers and turned the tables on them: he challenged them to assess their fitness to judge, forcing them to recognise their own sinfulness. Having dealt with them he attended to the woman, treating her with sensitivity. He did not condone her sin: his parting words were:

*Go now and leave your life of sin (v11)*

but he refused to condemn her. What is more, by asking her if anyone had condemned her, he helped her to realise that her accusers, too, were sinners.

Jesus accepted her as a sinner but left her a route out of her pattern of sin. He cared for this woman enough to ensure she did not face a cruel death at the hands of the self-righteous mob, and enough to ensure that she herself recognised her sinfulness yet did so without burdening her with guilt. He was truly concerned for her moral well-being, more interested in opening up a future for her rather than condemning her past.

Was that enough for her to turn her life around? Unfortunately we have no way of telling but we do know that the feeling of release from the condemnation of one's own sinfulness has been at the centre of coming to faith for countless Christians over the centuries. Was it, or is it, enough for you or me?

It certainly was in the case of the great hymn writer Charles Wesley, as we see below:

## For reflection

### A familiar hymn

1 And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

2 'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!  
Who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the firstborn seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love Divine!  
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,  
Let angel minds inquire no more.

3 He left His Father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace;  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race:  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me.

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

5 No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788) - written shortly after his experience of conversion in 1738*

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

We continue looking at biblical teaching on forgiveness and restoration during the remaining weeks of Lent:

Wed 24<sup>th</sup> March  
Wed 31<sup>st</sup> March

Mark 11:20-26  
Luke 23:32-43

Faith and Forgiveness  
Pardon

***The next S.P.A.C.E reflection will be posted on Wednesday March 24<sup>th</sup>***

## A prayer for today (St Patrick's Day, March 17<sup>th</sup>)

I bind unto myself today  
the virtues of the star-lit heaven,  
the glorious sun's life-giving ray,  
the whiteness of the moon at even,  
the flashing of the lightning free,  
the whirling wind's tempestuous shocks,  
the stable earth, the deep salt sea  
around the old eternal rocks.

Heavenly Father, maker of the world around us, we give you thanks for the sheer wonder and generosity of your creation. Help us use it wisely and to leave it in a state which generations will be able to enjoy as fully as we have done.

I bind this day to me forever,  
by power of faith, Christ's incarnation  
his baptism in Jordan's river,  
His death on cross for my salvation,  
his bursting forth from the spic`ed tomb,  
his riding up the heavenly ways,  
his coming at the day of doom,  
I bind unto myself today.

Lord Jesus, Son of God, Word made flesh, we give you thanks for your earthly life, teaching and example, for your death for us and above all for the grace by which we may share in the victory you bought for us. Give us the boldness to share this with others.

I bind unto myself today  
the power of God to hold and lead,  
his eye to watch, his might to stay,  
his ear to hearken to my need,  
the wisdom of my God to teach,  
his hand to guide, his shield to ward,  
the word of God to give me speech,  
his heavenly host to be my guard.

Holy Spirit, we give thanks that through your unseen presence we may sense God's power, protection and guidance. Help us to feel that presence in the routine things of our daily lives as much as in private prayer and public worship.

I bind unto myself the name,  
The strong name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three.  
By whom all nature hath creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord."

*(An 8<sup>th</sup> Century Irish prayer attributed to St Patrick)*