

I've always wondered what Jesus was writing when he knelt down to the ground tracing his finger through the dirt.. It's so interesting to me that he does this..not just once but twice in this short story that only takes up half a page in John chapter 8. What could've possibly been so important, so pressing that he felt the need to do this? In the midst of such a tense moment with people yelling from all directions, an angry crowd forming, a woman being tossed at his feet weeping, why did he choose to kneel down and do something so simple, so childlike as drawing in the dirt?

I've worked with kids a lot throughout my life so far, and I have found that many of them, if not most, really like the dirt. They like to kneel down and draw in it..play in it, and invite me to join in too. They have a way of seeing things I think that is invaluable, a perspective that can only be seen from a low place. Could this be part of what Christ was talking about when he said we must become like children in order to taste of the kingdom? I wonder if this is why Jesus chose, in the midst of a moment of great controversy and pain, to get down low on the ground. I wonder if he was trying to show us, teach us something.. A new way of seeing, of being?

I think one of the reasons why the story of the woman caught in adultery is so meaningful to me, is because I can relate to the characters in it. I have been like the woman, ashamed and weeping on the ground with fingers being pointed. I have also been the Pharisee, angry, self-justified with a stone in my hand ready to throw. But the beautiful, humbling thing to me is that Jesus the reconciler, the prince of peace, condemns neither the woman nor the ones ready to cast the stones. He speaks truth, but he does so in a way that convicts, causes self-reflection, transforms, redeems. With one sentence, one question, Jesus disarms a whole mob of people ready to commit a horrendous act of violence. He brings about the kingdom of redemption and justice not by picking up a stone and throwing it at her or back at the Pharisees, but simply by getting down low in the dirt.

When I was probably 18 or so, I was working at a retirement home where I was a waitress in the cafeteria serving food to the patients with dementia. And at this time I was going through an incredibly rough season with my family- I had dropped out of college, was in and out of a very unhealthy relationship, and felt like I was all on my own, barely scraping by financially. I noticed throughout the weeks months that I was working there that money sporadically kept going missing from my purse. We had a locker room where we kept all our stuff, and I didn't understand what was happening as I kept a lock on mine. But over a period of weeks when your cash keeps going missing (because you're not financially savvy and don't have a credit card and that's all you carry), and it starts becoming more frequent, you start questioning.. One day, during my shift I was desperate to use the bathroom, and usually I would just go on my break but I couldn't hold it any longer, and so I booked it to the locker room which had bathroom stalls in it and I flung open the door and in my rush I look to my left and out of the corner of my eye I see one of my co-workers (apparently she had come in early) right in front of my locker my lock in one hand and my purse in the other. And she looks at me, and I look at her and in an awkward state of shock, confusion, anger, and just a dire need to pee, I looked away, quickly went into the nearest stall and shut the door. As I was sitting there on the toilet, I'm thinking to myself-"how could she do that? She's been stealing my money, money that I need, this whole time! how dare she! I had even told her about how my money was missing and she just played along? Who does she think she is? I should go upstairs right now to tell my boss, demand I get my money back, and get her fired. After all it was probably more than just me she was stealing from. It would do us all a favor having her gone." All these thoughts were swarming. And in the midst of my mind racing, I was brought back to a hot summer day in a little town in Mexico, when God appeared to me in a very real way as a little street kid who knelt down in the dirt and demonstrated the love and mercy of Jesus to me in a way that I will never forget. Of how God receives me in my dirtiness and brokenness, and yet still continually extends his love and mercy. How he saw me there and whispered, "I do not condemn you"... The simple gospel.

And I knew in that moment what I was to do. So I went into the locker room and looked at her, she was just sitting there, kinda like the woman in the story, she knew what she had done- she was caught in the act, nowhere to run or go. She knew she could potentially lose her job now. And while I was tempted and wanting to throw my stone, I saw Christ kneeling down, writing my own name in the dirt, and so I walked over to her, picked up my purse, took out whatever cash I had in there, (I think it was only like 15 bucks), followed Christ's lead, knelt down on the ground and put my money in her hands. Right away she starts to cry...then I start to cry, and in that moment, we found solidarity in our brokenness, in our mutual dirtiness, and Christ presence was there in the midst of us. And for a moment as we embraced, we tasted together of the kingdom.

I share that story because I believe God taught me that day in a very real tangible way that I could understand, of mercy and of his type of justice. How God's sense of justice is not like my own. I want eye for eye. I want retribution. I want punishment. They have done this, and so they deserve this. And when I think of all the people who have done me wrong in this life, and the people who hurt, who abuse, who oppress others, I want to pick up my stone and chuck it. I want them to pay for the wrong they've done and the pain they've caused me, others. But is that the way of peace? The way of forgiveness, love, mercy?

I learned many things this past week at my training in Pennsylvania with MCC- it was amazing and I absolutely loved it. Probably one of the bigger things that stood out to me was when one of the speakers talked about how each person has a story- There's a reason why they do the things they do and think the things they think. What was it that caused the woman to commit adultery? Maybe she was in need of love, comfort, affection? What is it that caused my co-worker to feel the need to take the risk of breaking into my locker all those times? She was Latina, a little older than me a couple kids already..we were not payed well at our job, were they hungry? Is adultery justified, is theft justified? Is murder, is oppression is abuse? No, of course not.

But the God who created you and me and who dwells inside of us, also dwells inside of everyone else. And thank the Lord that this God has a way of dealing out justice that is so much better than our own. It is a justice that works to liberate, restore, heal and redeem, not just one, but both parties involved. The adulteress and the Pharisee, the victim and the abuser, the thief and the one being robbed. Like Nelson Mandela said in regards to racial justice, “It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed.”

In our own fight for justice, our work for peace in our daily lives, is this the posture of our hearts? Do we believe that those in power, those on the other side, have a story too? In a time of such polarization as we are living in now, are we building bridges or are we maintaining walls that keep us separated from people who do not think and act like us? Is our aim, our intentions, our motives when we speak truth to redeem, transform, or is it to prove ourselves right? I’ve always had a fiery justice bent towards me, and I find it ironic and actually a little disturbing how I often get this secret sense of pride and feel powerful when I speak truth to power. I feel good. And it is then that I can see very clearly how that same allure, temptation, is in me too.. maybe it manifests in different ways, but its there. Who am I to say that if was given the fruit, that I wouldn’t take it and wield it just as poorly? And every time that pride comes in, and I feel the weight of that stone in my hand, in my heart, my mind, I am convicted by this story in John as I see the beautiful Christ getting down low like a child drawing in the dirt. And as he writes my name, and I see it there side by side with all the people who have hurt me, hurt others, who I believe deserve retribution, he invites me once again to lay it down, to humble myself, and join him in a better way. A way of love, of mercy, of justice. A way that leads to peace. But am I willing to bend?