

The woman who was caught in adultery

These last two days have been days of ups and downs. Let me begin with the downs. I was lying in bed yesterday morning, when suddenly a group of men burst in through the door and pulled me from my bed. They threw a robe over my head and bundled me out of my door. Now I will admit that lying



in bed with me was a man, and he was not my husband, but still it was all rather scary. What was most annoying was that the man who was in bed with me, was left lying there, looking as sheepish as a man can when he has no clothes on and he is caught in the act of committing adultery. As I struggled with my captors and cursing as fluently as I know how, a little part of my brain wondered why I had been plucked up out of my bed, and just a little bit more of my brain was telling me that I should be scared. It is very rare these days that anyone is stoned for adultery, but this could be the day when they do it again, just to remind people like me what the punishment for adultery is.

After what seemed like hours, but would only have been minutes, we arrived in the Courts of the Temple. I was dragged through the crowd gathered there, and my captors threw me at the feet of a man sat on a seat in the shade. When I had spat the dust out of my mouth, I looked up, and to my amazement saw that I had been thrown at the feet of Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth. I had seen him the previous day when he had arrived in Jerusalem with a small group of his followers. I had stood in the shade at the edge of the crowd who sat to hear him talk about Yahweh. I have no illusions about what I am, so I knew I would not be welcomed to sit at the feet of such a popular and respected preacher. I had liked what I heard from him. He made Yahweh seem so much more about me than the teachers usually do, when they talk about keeping all the rules that the Pharisees and Sadducees say we need to keep in order to please Yahweh.

My problem is that I seem to have been set up to fail. I was married off by my parents, to a man who just wanted my parents money, and had no interest in me. I became pregnant, but the child died, and I nearly died giving birth. My husband could not have cared less about either of us. The wise woman who nursed me back to health

told me that it would be unlikely that I would ever be able to have any more children. When my husband was told this, he divorced me, and married an even richer wife. I could have remarried, but I enjoyed too much the freedom of knowing that I could not become pregnant.

Our rules of purity mean that a woman is impure while she has blood, and for seven days afterwards, so for fourteen days in every twenty eight a husband and wife may not lie together. Some men can manage, and remain faithful to their wives, but many cannot. It has been very profitable for me to comfort these men. Some of the wives have even been grateful to me, as it can save them from becoming pregnant time after time. I like to do what I can for my fellow woman. I know that technically I am an adulteress, but I consider myself as providing a useful service to the women of Jerusalem. Still, if anyone wanted to accuse me of adultery, they could find plenty of witnesses among those women who hate what I am and what I do, because their husbands have strayed in my direction.

So here I am, kneeling at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth, wondering what is going to happen next. Those self righteous captors of mine now haul me up to stand on my feet, and I am looking at Jesus. When one of them says 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' Then they stood back, and left me, the accused, standing on my own, alone before Jesus. Jesus looked up at me and regarded me for a very long time. It was such a look as stripped my soul bare. I wanted to cringe before it, but then he just looked down at the ground again without saying anything.

The accusers crowded round me again, and started throwing more questions at him. The more they pushed him, the more frightened I became, as it became clear to me that they really did want to take me out of the city and stone me to death, but they wanted Jesus to condemn me, for some reason of their own.

Jesus should have answered them, but he just sat there idly doodling in the dust. When at last they ran out of questions to which they were getting no answers, he looked up, and posed just one question for them 'Are any of you without sin? If you are, then you may throw the first stone.' I hunched over and flinched, expecting the stones to fall thick and fast, but nothing happened. Time passed, and still nothing happened. I raised my head, and straightened up. I looked around me, and saw that the only people still in the court were Jesus and myself. I looked back at Jesus into his smiling face. 'Do you know,' he said conversationally, 'that it was the oldest ones who left first, and the younger ones only left when it became obvious that their trap had not worked.' Then his face became stern again. 'They have not condemned you, so neither do I. Go your way in peace, and leave your life of sin.'

I turned and began to walk away, my head full of jumbled thoughts. I had just reached the other side of the court, when I turned and ran back to where Jesus was still sitting. Rabbi, will you and your followers eat the Sabbath meal with me tonight.

I want to thank you, and I want to know more about Yahweh. Jesus looked at me and smiled. 'We would be delighted to' he said.

After a hectic afternoon in the market buying more food for one meal than I have ever done. I cleaned my house from top to bottom, and I put away all the pretty materials I have draped around the house, that my lovers have given me over the years. I finally welcomed Rabbi Jesus and his friends to my house just as dusk was beginning. We lit the three candles to begin the Sabbath day of rest, and I pronounced the Kiddush, the prayer for the sanctification of the Sabbath. While we ate a simple meal of fruit and olives, bread and wine together, Rabbi Jesus reminded us of the story of our ancestors slavery in Egypt and the way in which Yahweh helped deliver our people from the cruelty of Pharaoh. The Rabbi's friends talked long into the night, but eventually they stretched out to sleep on the floor, wrapped up in their cloaks. I offered my bed to Rabbi Jesus, but he refused, so I lay down to sleep, on my own. In the morning we all went to the nearest synagogue for prayers. I slipped in behind the division to watch the ceremony, beginning with the presentation of the shewbread. Later, an unblemished male lamb and a measure of fine flour mixed with oil were offered as a sacrifice as Torah commanded.

When it was over, and for the first time the three hours of the ceremony seemed to pass really quickly, we returned to my house where we ate and drank again. This time we had some fish I had stuffed and cooked the previous day, as well as bread and fruit and wine. In the afternoon Rabbi Jesus sat around with his followers and taught them. I sat and listened along with them. We ate again in the evening, and when we went out to observe the first three stars of the night appearing, I knew that these two days, when I had nearly been put to death to make a point, and then had sat at the feet of Rabbi Jesus would be days that would influence my life for the better for the rest of my days. For the first time, I knew that my life was important, not just to me, but to Yahweh as well, and that I had to honour that in the way I live my life. As the Rabbi had put it, I must go and sin no more.