

## **Sermon about John 8, 3-11 on 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday a. Trinity 2022 in BXL (IV)**

**Greeting:** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Bible:** 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst 4 they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. 5 Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" 6 This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

**Sermon: 1. *Forgiveness as foundation for everything:*** Dear brothers and sisters, today's 4th Sunday after Trinity is about Christian community. It is about how community can be beneficial. The basic prerequisite for a free and equal community according to Christian standards – that is the congregation in its very own sense - is to meet each other as equals and with respect, and to forgive each other's sins just as God has forgiven each one of us. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." That is the all-important foundation. It is ultimately written on the stones of the hill of Golgotha and Jesus' cross and promises successful living as on Easter morning. Willingness to forgive is more important than anything else. Through it,

conflicts can be overcome and true peace can be achieved. Between people as well as between nations. Of course, this does not mean a mentality of silence and concealment or sweeping under the carpet, nor necessarily a mentality of looking away and forgetting. That would not be forgiveness and only a rotten peace. It means a mentality of fundamental respect, of meeting each other at eye level and the willingness to understand the other person and also to accept him or her with his or her weaknesses. And all this in the horizon of God, who is the Father of us all. - This is the unifying element of the readings for this Sunday.

**2. *That all and much more:*** And also in this sound and sense we can read the word for the sermon from the Gospel according to John today. There is a woman who has committed adultery, which according to the Old Testament law is punishable by death by stoning. The Pharisees and scribes want to see if Jesus knows this and respects and upholds the law, or if they can get him this way. Jesus prevents the stoning by pointing out the sinfulness of all involved. The plan is dropped. - So far, so good, so clear. And with that we have already discovered much that is important and true.

However, if we look closely, the word of Holy Scripture today leads us to yet another, superficially hidden way, which aims much further and is even more essential in this story. Let us look closely: First of all, we should realise today that, according to the ancient Oriental conception, this is not about a petty offence. Today, a "fling" or "one-night-stand" is something morally reprehensible at best and remains private. For decades, the offence has been abolished in our countries. In the time of Jesus, however, it was completely different. Adultery was deeply repulsive, because it endangers family and social cohesion. Through breach of trust and fidelity, it destroys the foundations of

human coexistence. Moreover, adultery is the biblical image of serving idols other than God alone. Through blasphemy and the worship of other gods, man becomes unfaithful to God. "It is adultery against God." - To understand what this is about and also not to arouse false sympathy for the woman, we must equate it with an equally repulsive criminal act for us, child abuse for example. This is an almost unforgivable act in our country. For contemporary listeners and readers of the Gospel, this woman is a real criminal who cannot be forgiven so easily. But there is something else. What are the Pharisees really concerned about here? Obviously not primarily about the woman's violation of the law. For adultery always involves two people, and according to Old Testament law the death penalty by stoning also applies to the man involved. And in general it is strange that the woman's husband is not even present. In addition, in the time of Jesus the death penalty for adultery was no longer applied at all, at worst as lynching. So, what is this really about? Obviously, the Pharisees and scribes aim to show up Jesus. The woman is only being misused for this purpose. Jesus is the real defendant here!

**3. Denying Jesus is sin:** Jesus dismantles the hidden accusation with one, prominent sentence: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." His sign-like writing in the sand remains enigmatic for us. But this one sentence has it all. One by one, the accusers leave the scene. The project has failed. Embarrassment and shame seep through the cracks. - Surely shame and self-knowledge are a reason for the accusers' retreat here. But for the Gospel of John, that would probably be too little. It does not fit the evangelist's concept of sin. Here and in John's Gospel, it is not about individual violations of laws. "Sin for [the evangelist] is essentially unbelief, the refusal to acknowledge Jesus: "Sin (means) that they do not believe in me" (John 16:9)" as Jesus says later in the Gospel. The sin that Jesus addresses concerns their

unbelief, that they reject Jesus. This is the point of the matter! Jesus' accusation is sin. That is central here. And the accusation moves: From the woman to Jesus and from there to those who are themselves unaware of sin. "Lack of self-knowledge and fatal self-righteousness" are the cause of sin. Those who do not have this also reject Jesus because they think they do not need him. This is what we have to recognise and learn, as in a mirror.

**4. *Who exposes Jesus must not fear trial:*** One more question arises at the end: Why doesn't the woman disappear too? Her offence is not questioned. She is obviously an adulteress. But she could have simply gone after the others. Jesus would certainly not have held her back. That way she probably would have had nothing to fear. "While the accusers disappear the moment they themselves become defendants and evade their own sin as well as Jesus' judgement, the woman literally stands by her offence and faces Jesus the judge. [...] In this respect, the adulteress' behaviour of facing Jesus' judgement can be considered as an acknowledgement of her offence [...]." What follows is the dismissal of the case. The sin is not pursued. Jesus does not condemn her. But neither does he acquit her, nor does he forgive her. Jesus tells her, "Sin no more." With this he points her to the divine law. She knows how to live rightly. This is what she is to do. Whoever exposes himself to Jesus in the consciousness of his own guilt no longer has to fear judgement. That is what this is about: self-righteousness and a lack of consciousness of guilt, which affects us all. And it is about overcoming this in the light of the person of Jesus Christ and with his help. To recognise myself and then to take refuge completely in Jesus' arms. That is where a successful life is to be found.

**Blessing:** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.