

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
**Naked Gospel: Jesus Plus Nothing (part 2)**  
**Hebrews 8:6-8a, 13 \* John 8:1-11: January 14 & 15, 2012**  
**Pastor Rick Fossum**

John Wesley, the founder and early leader of Methodism, was miserable. If anyone should have been confident about their relationship with God, it should have been Wesley. After all, he was ordained as an Anglican priest; he had been a missionary to the Native Americans in America; he had been involved in a prison ministry; he was an Oxford scholar. His personal spiritual habits included reading the Bible and regular prayer.

But, he was miserable, Not even his impressive resume, brought him any inner peace or the assurance of knowing that he was right with God. He was full of doubts. He kept asking, **“Am I right with God? Am I saved? Am I going to heaven?”** For Wesley, these questions had no answers. Did I say he was miserable?

And then one night, he was invited to a meeting that would change his life. Wesley, in his journal, wrote these words:

**“That evening I reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to Romans*. About 8:45 p.m., while the reader was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”**

After this night, Wesley’s doubts disappeared. He found peace and assurance. Again, he put it this way: **“I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”**

Wesley was wrestling with legalism, which gives no peace, no assurance of any kind versus the grace of God . . . the free, unmerited grace of God.

This is the second message in a series Pastor Ray and I are calling *The Naked Gospel* series. In this series, we hope and pray that all of us will examine our faith and find the grace and freedom that will allow us to be the persons God created us to be.

The story of the adulterous woman captures the essence of what this *Naked Gospel* series is all about: the law versus grace, light versus darkness, turmoil versus peace.

The story begins with when the adulterous woman is caught cheating on her husband.

She was caught *red-handed* as some people would say. She couldn't defend herself. She couldn't make excuses. She was wrong. She was wrong and she knew it.

What happened to her lover, the Bible doesn't say. It's my guess that he got away. Anyway, the story isn't about him. It's about her.

The story is also about a group called the Pharisees. They were the religious leaders of Israel. It was their job to know all 613 Jewish laws and it was their job to make sure the Jewish people followed them or else. Even the '*or else*' part . . . *the consequence part* was their responsibility. They made sure people paid for their sins.

Basically, they were good people. They had a job to do. It was an important job in their eyes. They were the defenders of the Jewish faith. It was their job to keep the Jewish faith alive by their constant attention to the law.

Jesus had been a royal pain in their side. He was threatening their Jewish faith by questioning and challenging their laws and rules and the Pharisees didn't like it. They started scheming for ways to test Jesus . . . to trap him. The case of the adulterous woman would be their perfect test.

One day, they heard about a woman who was adulterous. By the way, the woman is never named. She's just the *adulterous woman* throughout the story. This was the test the Pharisees were looking for. Will Jesus follow the law? Will he do what the law required? Or, will he do something else?

One of the Pharisees said, **“let's take this woman to Jesus. Let's test him.”**

They grabbed her and they dragged her down Main Street where everyone could see her. Her neighbors, her friends, even her family watched as she's paraded in front of everyone.

Can you feel her sense of shame as she's dragged through the streets of her town? Can you hear the snickers, the whispers and the sneers? Can you feel her sense of fear because she knows exactly which law she has broken just like the Pharisees dragging her? Can you feel her sense of hopelessness? It's all a matter of time before she's punished according to the law.

She stumbles and she falls along that dusty street as the Pharisees pull at her and tug her. She can barely see because of the tears running down her face.

The Pharisees find to Jesus. A crowd gathered around them. They throw the adulterous woman to the ground and they point their fingers at her. They issue the test.

**“Jesus,”** they demanded, **“we caught this woman in the act of adultery. She's in**

violation of commandment number seven, *'Thou shall not commit adultery'*. Now, according to the law . . . “

This is at the heart of the story. It's where the law meets grace. **“According to the law Jesus, this woman must be stoned to death. What do you say, Jesus? Do you follow the law or not?”**

The trap has been set!

Laws and rules are normally a good thing. They set boundaries for us. They tell how fast to drive. How to do our jobs. How to live together. How to take care of ourselves. Even the law *“thou shalt not commit adultery”* is a good law to follow. I don't think anyone would disagree.

The problem was this: the Pharisees had made following these laws a condition of their faith. If you broke any of these laws, you broke your relationship with God. The formula was simple. *'Follow the law equals a right relationship with God. If you don't follow the law, equals a broken relationship with God'*. It was simple, but impossible. The Jewish people tried and tried, but they could never find peace with God. They never had the assurance of knowing that their relationship with God was unbroken.

The adulterous woman had made her choice. She had broken the law. She had no recourse. According to the law, she had no hope of seeing another day because she had broken commandment number seven.

**“According to the law, Jesus,”** the Pharisees said, **“this woman must be stoned to death. What do you say?”**

Jesus said nothing for the longest time. The adulterous woman, the Pharisees were all waiting for his reply. Jesus bent down and started writing something on the ground. We don't know what he was writing.

The Pharisees were relentless. **“Come on Jesus, what do you say? We don't have all day. Let's hear it.”**

And then, Jesus spoke these words of grace: **“Whoever is without sin, you cast the first stone. Whoever has not broken a law, you throw first. Whoever is without a blemish, you do it.”**

And one by one, the Pharisees, the accusers, dropped their stones back on the street where they found them and walked away.

This is grace. Grace happens when you and I get something we don't deserve. Grace is receiving something we can't pay for or earn.

Jesus offered forgiveness to the woman and not stoning. He offered grace and not punishment.

A long time ago, Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins and mine. Like the adulterous woman, we didn't deserve it either, but he forgave us anyway. He took all of our sins, all of our broken laws and rules and washed them away. He did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. He made things right for us with God once and for all time.

Right now, exactly the way you are, Jesus Christ loves you and accepts you. It doesn't matter what you did yesterday or today or what you'll do tomorrow, you are forgiven, loved and free to live the life you were created to live.

Jesus said to the woman, **“Woman, where are they that accuse you? Has no one condemned you?”**

She said, **“no one, sir.”**

**“Then,”** Jesus said, **“neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”**

What happened to her? We don't know. It's my hope and prayer that she had a life-changing experience that day and lived to be the person God created her to be.

It's called grace. Grace isn't about allowing us to break laws and rules without consequence. We know better. We all know that if we drive 100 mph on the road, we will get caught, ticketed and fined.

Grace is *Jesus Plus Nothing* else. Grace is the assurance of knowing that nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Grace is having the assurance of knowing that we are loved, accepted and free without condition, without payment of any kind, without even deserving it.

Come back next week, and hear about how you can be free from the guilt of laws broken. Find out how you can have a right relationship with God in Jesus Christ and discover what that relationship might look like.