

## CAUGHT IN THE ACT

John 8:1-11

**TEXT:** *Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "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?" 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. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Those of us who are old enough to remember the Watergate Scandal that brought down the 37<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. President Richard Nixon was found to be aware of a burglary of the Democrat Party's National office at the Watergate Hotel, and in 1974 he resigned rather than to face impeachment. Having lived through those political years I recall it being said quite often that it wasn't the two-bit burglary of an office that brought down the president. It was the cover-up attempt of President Nixon and his administration. To this day, the word "Watergate" symbolizes political scandals that are of the level of destroying someone's political career.

Exposing a "cover-up" may bring down a president, but exposing a cover-up can also save a soul from eternal damnation. One day, early in the morning, some Jewish teachers and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught in the act of adultery. One wonders about their surveillance tactics, yet they expose the secret sin of this woman: *At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.* It's just past sun-up as they interrupt the Lord's Bible class. One also wonders, where is the guy she was with? Is he free from sin?

What hypocrisy! These Jewish religious leaders are not concerned about this woman's faith and salvation. They are full of hate for Jesus and use this sad situation not to humiliate this woman, but to trap Jesus using the Old Testament Scriptures: *They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "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?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.* But what was intended to be Jesus' demise, backfires on them, exposing their faithless hypocrisy while giving our Savior the joy of saving a woman who would have been lost had her sin not been exposed.

We all know how it feels to be "caught in the act." Already when we were children we felt the humiliation, the embarrassment, the shame of getting caught for covering up our sinful behaviors. And it's even worse for us when this happens when we are adults who should know better. But we are sinful, and with a sinful nature that the Bible describes as being only evil all the time, what are we to do when we are "caught in the act"? Let us do what we have already done this morning. Rather than cover-up, there is confession, honest confession of our sins.

We don't want to be like those godless Jewish religious leaders who were poking around searching out sinful behaviors. That's what gossip is all about. Surely, none of us have a desire to gossip or even to listen to gossip. None of us will speak about another in a way that exposes their sins to others, nor will we delight in hearing about the sins and failures of others, right?

But we are sinners who live among sinners, and it's bound to happen that someone might commit a sin and we witness the offense. What are we to do? Jesus tells us what to do: *If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.* Mt

Those Jewish religious leaders had no mind to win an adulterous couple to repentance and salvation. The Bible says that they used this poor woman as a trap for Jesus. But Jesus would expose their own cover-up: *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. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 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.* What a blessing! She was alone with Jesus! What would Jesus do to her? *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* What a comfort this was for this woman! Humiliated by men who had exposed her sin in such a cruel fashion, religious leaders who were using her to trap Jesus, now stands before the Judge of heaven and earth and declared forgiven. *"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."* How her life was now changed! Free to serve her God and Lord!

Caught in the act by evil men turned into a great blessing as she hears her God declare her forgiven!

It has become a popular theme in the religious world surrounding us today that speaks of feeling happy and good about ourselves. They don't like those dour and sour Lutherans who only speak of sin and death. When you hear someone who speaks this way about our Lutheran worship, watch the look on their face when you tell them, "I don't go to church to feel good about myself. I go to church to rejoice in hearing my Savior's called minister say: **"Upon this, your confession of sin, I by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, forgive you ALL YOU SINS, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."** With that wonderful declaration of the Judge of heaven and earth, we begin another week of freedom to live for our Lord and for others. This is the true joy of Christian worship. It is the joy of sins forgiven!

Without confession of sin, there remains the hypocrisy of the cover-up. There is no true joy in this as David himself says when he writes: *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.* Ps 32 David was well aware of his adultery with Bathsheba. But God had to catch him in the act, and did when the Lord graciously allowed Bathsheba to become pregnant. The king had fallen in to an arrogant self-confidence without realizing it. It's like when we become careless in our concern for our sinful ways, not realizing how dangerously close we are to falling. The Lord let David get caught in order to bring him to Jesus.

God had let that adulterous woman get caught by evil Pharisees in order to bring her to Jesus. Truly she rediscovered the joy of David's Psalm: *I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"-- and you forgave the guilt of my sin.* Ps 32 And if, and when this happens to us, may we find ourselves standing before Jesus.

It is the purpose of our Christian worship to focus all our attention on Jesus and his cross. It is the purpose of God's Law to condemn us so that we fear our sins and have no desire to cover them up. It is the purpose of the Gospel to make our hearts look up to see Jesus standing there. With contrite and penitent hearts Christians will find in true Lutheran worship that the only joy that lasts is the joy of confession instead of cover-up, and the words of our Lord telling us that our sins are forgiven, and the invitation: *Go now and leave your life of sin.* Then we can walk out of this worship service, not feeling any good about ourselves, but rejoicing in the grace and mercy of our Savior!

Now, having confessed our sins and having heard the promises of our Savior, let us go in peace and joy. Amen