

By a show of hands how many of y'all like a clean house? (pause) How many of y'all like for everything to be in its place and for there to be a place for everything? (pause) I love it when the trash is taken out, the dishes are clear or waiting to be put away in the dry wrack, and the clutter is cleared off the floor. You probably cannot tell it by looking at the desk in my office, but I love it when the house is clean and at rest at the end of the night because that means Karen and I can rest. (pause) However, I have four children. (pause) There are days when it feels as though we will be cleaning something up every moment of every day forever. There is always something that needs to be put away in its place. Where we get into trouble is when we try to do the same thing with people. People are not stuff.

Let me ask y'all another question. (pause) Have y'all ever felt like somebody needs to be put in their place? (pause) I know I am a pastor, but there are times when I have felt like and even wanted to put someone in their place. (pause) It will come as no surprise in this room there have been well meaning church members who have wanted to put me in my place. (pause) Church, what is the problem with putting people in their place? (pause) People are not stuff. People are not stuff.

My brothers and sisters; all of y'all check this out. The scribes and Pharisees wanted to put Jesus in His place. They set out to test Jesus (John 8:6). I think it is fair to say the scribes and Pharisees did not like Jesus. They were at odds with the things Jesus taught. The scribes and the Pharisees did not like the things Jesus taught or the way Jesus interpreted the Law of Moses. So just like one of my children's toys they wanted to put Jesus in His place. They wanted Jesus to go away. (pause) The problem is people are not stuff. Jesus did not treat people like objects. (pause) Jesus did not treat people like objects, and I can prove it.

In this morning's passage the scribes and the Pharisees found and captured a woman who had been caught in adultery. The Pharisees and scribes were right to stop this woman from sinning. The Ten Commandments clearly say, "you shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). However, the Scripture they are trying to use does not come from the Law of Moses, or the Ten Commandments. It comes from the prophet Ezekiel 23:45-47.

Ezekiel 23:45-47 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

⁴⁵But righteous men shall pass judgment on them with the sentence of adulteresses, and with the sentence of women that shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is upon their hands."

⁴⁶For thus says the Lord GOD: "Bring up a host against them, and make them an object of terror and a spoil. ⁴⁷And the host shall stone them and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses.

Now the Pharisees were not wrong in saying this woman had committed a sin. Adultery is a sin, and this woman was wrong. However, we miss the point if we think this passage is just about a woman caught in adultery. This passage is about what happens when we try to treat people like the messy stuff in our homes that needs to be put away or thrown out. This passage is about how we treat people, as opposed to how Jesus treats people.

The scribes and Pharisees wanted to get Jesus. They were not concerned, and they did not care who they hurt just so long as they put Jesus in His place. They wanted to discredit Jesus. As far as they were concerned this woman is a sinner; therefore, she is expendable. For the scribes and Pharisees this woman might as well have

been the wooden stick you use to stir paint. She was useful so long as she was useful and they did not much care if she was thrown away. By their own teaching she was supposed to be stoned to death.

So let me ask y'all, "How did Jesus treat the woman caught in adultery?" (pause for answers) How did Jesus treat this woman put in harm's way? (pause) Did Jesus condemn this woman? (pause) Had this woman committed a sin? (pause) Brothers and sisters, please tell me, who is the only person who can rightfully judge people for their sins? (pause for answers) And yet, Jesus did not condemn the woman? (pause)

My sisters and brothers, when it comes to people who are different from us, who do we act more like – the scribes and Pharisees; or Jesus? (long pause) Too many days we, the Church, act like the scribes and the Pharisees. (pause) Too many days and too many times we treat people like stuff to be used, abused and thrown out when we decide they are no longer useful. When we treat people like objects it is easy to miss out on a person's sacred worth. This is a never judge a book by its cover kind of thing. When we treat people like objects it is real easy to start throwing people out the way we might throw out broken toys or chipped china. Let's get rid of all the liberals! After all they want to let in the gays. Let's get rid of the homosexuals while we are at it. Let's get rid of the people who are too hard, or judgmental. We might as well get rid of the right wing conservatives for being too loud or in your face. If we are gonna get rid of the conservatives we might as well throw out the fundamentalists as well because I don't like people who take such a narrow black and white view of Scripture. Aren't they more like "guidelines anyway?"¹ (pause) Brothers and sisters, what happens when we put everyone we don't like in their place? What happens when we throw them all out? (pause)

There was once a man who was marooned on a deserted island all by himself. He was all alone on this island. One day a ship happened upon the island, and they found the man. As they were talking to the man they noticed a rock building up on a nearby hill. When they asked the man about the building he told them, "That was my church, but I didn't like it there so I left."

How many churches are there in this area that have shrunk down to just a few? (pause) I wonder why that is. (pause) I know the mills and manufacturing have largely left, but I wonder what the other reason is. (pause) Could it be that when the jobs left, and their children left to find jobs in other places, these little churches did not, and have not yet reached out to the people who are different from them? (pause) Are we different from the smaller churches? Are we content to be alone in this space with no one to ask us to change?

How did Jesus treat the woman caught in adultery? She was a sinner. She had been caught in the middle of her sin of adultery. By right Jesus is the Christ, the King above all kings and God. Jesus was the only one who had the right to condemn her. What did Jesus do? (pause) If we are to follow Jesus' example, are we to allow other people's shortcomings to get in the way of inviting them to church? (pause) Aren't we all sinners? Who here would be worthy to throw the first stone? (pause) No one. Therefore we have no excuse. There is no reason we should not inquire of everyone we meet as to whether they have a church home. There is no good excuse not to invite people to come to church with us. We should be inviting people to join us in growing closer to God together. We should be inviting people to join us in serving the poor and working poor. We should be inviting people to join us in learning more about God and God's Word. People are not stuff to be thrown away when they are no longer useful. People are the mission of the church. Not just the people in our pews and the people we like, but all people; everywhere.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

¹ "Pirates of the Caribbean, Curse of the Black Pearl"