We have the story of two woman who were on condemned to death – the story of Susana and the story of the adulterous woman. While the stories are similar, there one big difference – Susana was in fact innocent whereas the adulterous woman was guilty.

Let me make some very introductory comments about the gospel reading of the adulterous woman. Scripture scholars who do textual analysis of the texts tell us that this section does not belong to the fourth gospel. This story is an intrusion at this place in the gospel and sounds more like a story that fits the style of either Matthew, Mark, or Luke. However, in this format, this story is not found in any of the other gospels. So where did this story come from? There was an ancient popular tradition that floated around. The scribes who finally put the gospel of John together wanted to preserve the remarkable story in its written form and a place had to be found for it. They put it in a place where it would least disturb the integrity of the text. It disturbs the systemic account of the gospel but the scribes were willing to take that risk to preserve the story.

The fact that this story was included in the gospel tells us how important it was for the scribes to present Jesus’ ministry in the way which it unfolded.

There are Three parts to the story:

* The Scribes and Pharisees and Jesus.
  + The scribes and the Pharisees have created a public, legal situation for Jesus. Jesus is being challenged by the Law of Moses. The woman’s public and tragic exposure is meant to debate the Law. The fact that it is putting Jesus in a spot and that was their intention. The sad thing is that the Pharisees do not care about woman. She is merely a tool, an object! She is being exploited here. Of course, they let the man go.
* Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees.
  + It is impossible to identify the purpose of Jesus bending down and writing with his finger on the ground. It is best understood as indifference and perhaps even disappointment with the proceedings.
  + Even harder to guess is what he wrote on the ground. There simply is no way to guess… and every guess that has been made is nothing but speculation.
  + His answer is brilliant. They all leave…
* Jesus and the woman.
  + “Has no one condemned ‘you?’” “You!” For the first time the woman is being treated as a human person. She is no longer an object.
  + She is worthy of entering into a relationship with.
  + She calls him “Lord.”
  + Based on the relationship that Jesus has established, he can challenge her not to sin anymore.
  + “Go” means that Jesus is restoring her back to society (which the Pharisees denied her) and “sin no more” gives her the possibility of new life.
  + St. Augustine says, “Only two remain, the wretched woman and the incarnation of mercy!”

Practical implication

The means for God’s involvement with humanity is “mercy.” Period. Let me put it in today’s parlance. In computer language there is something called an interface. An interface is a shared boundary which two separate parts of the computer use to exchange information. We cannot use a computer without an interface. For example, the software program is the interface between the computer and the human person. The interface between God and humanity is ‘mercy.”

Sometimes we forget this. So, for example, there are people saying, the coronavirus is God’s wrath, God’s chastisement, God’s punishment. And then whatever issue they are against, they say that the virus is God’s chastisement for that issue. So they are creating an interface for God’s involvement with humanity that supports their cause. So everybody can create their own interface… I am pleading with you… don’t listen to them.

All you need to do is understand the gospel and Jesus interaction with humanity. In all of the gospel, there is not one instance where Jesus converted someone by punishing or condemning them, no matter what the situation… not an adulterous woman, not even the people who put him on the cross. Rather, he showed mercy. To the very end, Jesus showed mercy.

Sure God wants us to overcome sin. But the interface that God uses is not chastisement, wrath, and punishment. It is ‘mercy.’ Mercy has a name. His name is Jesus.