

## HOMILY

### *The Land of Beginning Again*

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Have you ever had the experience of making a mess out of something and longing for a chance to start out all over with a clean slate? Most of us yearn for the kind of place described by Louise Tarkington:

*I wish there were some wonderful place  
Called The Land of Begging Again,  
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches  
And all our poor selfish grief  
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door  
And never put on again.*

There is such a place. You are in it. The Church is *The Land of Beginning Again*.

Our text today is a distinctive jewel of John's Gospel. The account of Jesus' encounter with an adulterous woman is a treasure beyond measure. No other incident in his life, except his death, so clearly revealed the heart of God.

One day a posse of self-righteous Pharisees acting as moral vigilantes dragged a poor woman to Jesus. They had caught her in the very act of adultery. What fear and embarrassment she must have felt! Probably half naked, browbeaten, scorned, and in danger of execution by stoning.

"You know what The Law says," they bellowed at Jesus. "But what do you say?" Jesus was in a bind. The Law of Moses clearly said that this woman should be stoned to death. But if he approved the execution, he would run afoul of the Romans who ran the country. They claimed the sole right to exercise the death penalty. On the other hand, if Jesus sided with the hated Romans, he would alienate the Jews.

Jesus knelt and wrote on the sand. Some say that was to divert attention from the frightened woman. Don't we wish one of the Disciples had made a few notes on what Jesus wrote? Some think he wrote this question, "Where is the man?" After all, if she committed adultery, there had to be a man involved. He is as guilty as she. Where is he? Some think that Jesus wrote down the sins of the judgmental Pharisees.

Finally, Jesus stood and proclaimed a principle that will break up any capital punishment anywhere anytime: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." The Law is just, Jesus was saying, but no one but God is righteous enough to exact the ultimate penalty—to take away life itself.

Then Jesus knelt and wrote again. I wonder what he wrote this time. Maybe these words: "Someone must die for her sin; but not her. It will be me." There was a long silence broken by an occasional thud of dropping rocks. The Pharisees had enough integrity left to turn and slink away. Finally, everyone had departed except the woman and Jesus. He stood, looked into her eyes and said, "I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more."

In these two brief sentences, Jesus was saying: Sin is real. You are guilty of it. But your life is not over yet. God still loves you. You have another chance.

That adulterous woman represents all of us. We are all sinners. The only thing different about us are the symptoms of our sin and whether or not we have found the cure.

To us, God sends this word: Your verdict has been rendered. You are guilty as charged. But your sentence has not been pronounced. The good news is that a pardon has arrived with your name written on it. It can be yours if you just admit your guilt and accept the pardon. Someone named Jesus died in your place. If you accept his gift, you can become a new person.

Dr. A. J. Cronin was a great Christian physician in England. One night he assigned a young nurse to a little boy brought to the hospital suffering from diphtheria and was given only a slight chance to live. A tube was inserted into the boy's throat to help him breathe. It was the nurse's job to systematically clean the tube. As the nurse sat beside the boy's bed, she accidentally dozed off. She awakened to find

that the tube had become blocked. Instead of following instructions, she was immobilized by panic. Hysterically she called the doctor from his home. By the time he got to the boy, he was dead.

Dr. Cronin was angry beyond expression. That night Dr. Cronin went to his office and wrote his recommendation to the board demanding the immediate expulsion of the nurse. He called her in and read it, trembling with anger. She stood there in pitiful silence, a tall, thin, gawky girl. She nearly fainted with shame and remorse. “Well,” asked Dr. Cronin in a harsh voice, “have you nothing to say for yourself?” There was more silence, and then she uttered this pitiful plea, “Please give me another chance.”

Dr. Cronin sent her away. But he could not sleep that night. He kept hearing some words from the dark distance: “Forgive us our trespasses.” The next morning Dr. Cronin went to his desk and tore up the report. In the years that followed he watched as the slim, nervous girl became the head of a large hospital and one of the most honored nurses in England.

Thank God for a second chance, and a third chance, and a fourth chance!

Do you need to encounter God’s forgiveness? He died on a cross to make it available. Let this be for you *The Land of Beginning Again*.