

It can be good to make kind of a movie in your head using Scripture as the story line. St. Ignatius of Loyola suggested something like that as a form of prayer. My movie, based on this gospel, opens with Jesus spending a night on the Mount of Olives. He's alone, but not really alone, he's in prayer. The Father and the Spirit are with him. You can't see them on the screen but in his face, the Spirit of Love is flowing between him and the Father.

He does get some sleep and, next morning, goes to the temple area. It's a beautiful Spring day: blue sky, gentle breeze, birds singing, the whole bit. Somebody recognizes him and comes up to talk. Someone else joins them and soon there's a nice little crowd gathered around Jesus, listening to him.

He values them, wants to teach them, finds a stone bench to sit on, and they gather round. I thought about whether they would stand before him or sit on the ground. I don't know what the custom was in those days, but decided to have them sit. It's a modern movie and I think that's what we'd expect today. Besides, it gives a better camera shot to a disturbance coming from the distance: some self-righteous types on a mission. They drag a woman along with them but she's just a pawn in their game. They're only using her to get at Jesus.

“Teacher!” they say, interrupting whatever he was saying at that point, “this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded

us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They're excited! They've got him! He can't say “Stone her” without getting in trouble with the Romans, who did not allow capital punishment to the Jews. They were more than happy to do that themselves! But Jesus couldn't say “Don't stone her” without denying the Law of Moses! They've got him trapped! They're having fun!

The folks with him are annoyed at the disruption but Jesus looks up at the newcomers from his bench, smiles a little bit, values them, though they don't value him. He wants to teach them too. He doesn't get up, he doesn't say a word, just reaches down and starts doodling on the ground.

The bullies are not getting what they want, so they keep at him, demanding an answer to their question. Finally, and calmly, he looks up at them, regards each of them personally, holding them in respect, and says “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then he goes back to writing on the ground – as if he knows what's going to happen.

In my movie, one of the elders sees an acquaintance of his sitting by Jesus and thinks “Uh, oh, that guy knows about me. If I throw the first stone, he's gonna tell!” He goes away. Another one realizes that the trap has backfired: throwing the first stone could get him in trouble with the Romans! He leaves too. Another was just along for the ride, going with the crowd but not really ready to do violence to anyone. He leaves too – since other people are doing it! But one of them was deeply moved. He had been one of the vocal ones out to get Jesus, but Jesus had

responded with respect and with love. Jesus seemed to know him, seemed to care about him. This man now saw the woman with new eyes. Still didn't approve of what she'd done, but was it really any worse than some of the things he'd done? He went away a changed man.

Soon, they were all gone, except for the woman, and the original group of listeners. Jesus stops writing on the ground, looks up at her with love and says "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir." She's not sure what to do. This man has just saved her, but she doesn't really know why. Is he looking for some kind of repayment from her? Does he, also, think she's dirt? He says "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

He doesn't want repayment! And now the look in his eyes comes home to her for what it really is: he cares about her, he genuinely cares about her! He sees that what she's been doing, the life she's been living, is keeping her down, making her miserable. He wants to lift her up from all that! She, too, goes away changed.

How about you? How about me? Jesus changes people, at least those who respond to him and let him do so. Maybe you were in my movie: a self-righteous judgmental person?, a bully?, a crowd follower?, one of the listeners? Or perhaps you've been caught in the very act of doing something you knew you shouldn't. No matter which fits best, or if any of them do, Jesus loves you as he loved each of them. Let him change you.