

The Wise Put Down Their Stones John 8:1–11

There is something deeply human about holding a stone.

Not just the physical kind, but the inward ones: judgment, resentment, quiet condemnation, the subtle belief that we see more clearly than someone else. Stones are not always visible, but they are heavy. And if we are honest, we have all carried them.

In John 8:1–11, we meet a crowd holding stones. But we also meet Christ, who invites them and us to lay them down.

And as we reflect on this passage, we hear an echo that resonates deeply with the Quaker tradition: that there is **that of God in everyone**, and that the **Inner Light** exposes both our sin and our capacity for grace.

Let us step into the scene.

Jesus is teaching in the temple courts when the scribes and Pharisees interrupt Him. They drag a woman into the center; a woman caught in adultery. She is not treated as a person, but as a problem.

They say, “Teacher, the Law of Moses commands us to stone such women. What do you say?”

They are not seeking truth; they are seeking justification for violence.

I’m going to pause and point out something that always bothered me about this story: where is the dude? A woman caught in the act of adultery - we assume that she was caught with someone, but they are let off scott free?

But Jesus does something unexpected.

He bends down and writes on the ground.

In Quakers tradition, we might recognize this moment as a kind of holy pause, a refusal to react out of urgency, and instead a turning inward, a listening. Before speaking, Jesus creates space. Silence. Stillness.

And then He says:

“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.”

And suddenly, the noise quiets.

One by one, they walk away.

Showing us the power in Quaker silence, the power to change, the power to save.

1. The Wise Turn to the Inner Light

When Jesus speaks, He does not argue the law. He speaks to the conscience.

He invites each person to look inward.

This is deeply aligned with the Quaker understanding that truth is not only proclaimed outwardly, but revealed inwardly through the Inner Light, the presence of Christ within, illuminating what is true.

The accusers came focused on her sin.

But Jesus redirects them to their own hearts.

And in that moment of inward examination, something shifts.

They begin to see themselves clearly.

The stones become heavier.

And they let them fall.

The wise are those who listen to that inward light.

Who pause before reacting.

Who examine their own lives before judging another.

Who trust that the Light will reveal not only the faults of others but their own need for grace.

It isn't comfortable to look within, but it is important.

2. The Wise Choose Peace Over Punishment

Quakers have long been known as a peace tradition, not just in refusing war, but in rejecting violence in all forms, including the violence of condemnation.

And make no mistake: what is happening in this story is a form of communal violence.

It is public shaming. Moral outrage. Collective judgment.

It is the kind of energy that still exists today in our conversations, our communities, even our churches.

But Jesus disrupts that cycle.

He refuses to participate in a system that dehumanizes.

Instead, He embodies what we all believe, that the Light is in all people, and he asks them to look within themselves and to access that light. The commitment to see every person as worthy of dignity because they bear the image of God.

To throw a stone is to deny that truth.

To put it down is to affirm it.

They choose peace because love is more powerful than condemnation.

3. The Wise Practice Compassion Rooted in Equality

One of the core Quaker testimonies is equality, the belief that every person carries the Light of Christ within them.

That means this woman is not disposable.

It also means the accusers, though self-righteous, are not beyond transformation.

Jesus treats the woman not as a category, but as a person.

After everyone leaves, He speaks directly to her:

“Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

For the first time in this story, she has a voice.

She says, “No one, sir.”

And Jesus responds, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and leave your life of sin.”

This is compassion without compromise.

He does not excuse her actions, but He restores her dignity.

He speaks to the Light within her, the part of her that can still choose a new path.

And this is where Quaker theology deepens our understanding:

We do not extend grace because people deserve it.

We extend grace because God's Light is still present in them, even when it is dimmed.

The wise see that Light and respond to it.

4. The Wise Embrace Silence Before Action

Notice again how this story unfolds.

Before Jesus speaks, He kneels.

Before he answers, he writes.

Before the crowd disperses, there is silence.

This is not incidental.

In the Quaker tradition, silence is not empty, it is expectant. It is a posture of listening for God's voice beneath the noise of our own impulses.

How often do we pick up stones too quickly?

How often do we react without reflection?

The wise resist that urgency.

They wait.

They listen.

They allow space for the Spirit to speak.

And often, in that silence, the desire to condemn begins to loosen its grip.

What if putting down our stones begins not with a dramatic decision—but with a quiet pause?

A moment of inward listening?

A willingness to let God interrupt our certainty?

5. The Wisest One Saw the Light in Everyone

Here is the heart of the story:

The only person who had the right to throw a stone... chose not to.

Jesus, who was without sin, did not condemn.

Instead, He extended mercy.

Why?

Because He saw what others could not—or would not see.

He saw beyond the woman's sin to her humanity.

He saw beyond the accusers' righteousness to their need.

He saw the Light in all of them.

And he responded accordingly.

This is the wisdom we are invited into.

Not naïve acceptance.

Not moral indifference.

But a deeper vision, one shaped by grace.

Conclusion: Lay Down the Stone, Walk in the Light

So today, we return to that simple, challenging truth:

The wise put down their stones.

They do so because they have looked inward and seen their own need for mercy.

They do so because they have chosen peace over punishment.

They do so because they recognize the Light of God in every person.

They do so because they have learned to listen before they act.

And they do so because they follow a Savior who chose mercy when He had every right to judge.

So, the question is not whether you have a stone.

We all do.

The question is: will you hold onto it... or will you lay it down?

Will you act out of reaction... or out of reflection?

Will you see only the fault in others... or the Light within them?

Friends, the invitation is clear:

Walk in the Light.

Listen deeply.

Love boldly.

And when you feel the weight of the stone in your hand

be wise enough to let it fall.

Amen.