

# Biblical Background

JOHN 8:1-11

**GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING:** This scene takes place in Jerusalem at the Temple Mount. The temple was built upon the rock where it is believed that Abraham sacrificed Isaac. The temple would have looked in size and stature like St. Peter's basilica that is built over the tomb of St. Peter at the Vatican. It was customary for people to gather outside the temple, just as they do today in St. Peter's square. Many religious leaders would have been found there, and only men would gather first thing in the morning. Women were not permitted until later in the day, so their bringing a woman into the crowd, put her in a very isolated and vulnerable position.

**TERMS: Stoning** The leaders tried to trap Jesus by saying that the Law of Moses commanded that such a woman be stoned to death (see Deuteronomy 22:22, and note how the man who was caught in the act with her was conveniently missing). They wanted to know his opinion on this charge, and what he, as the "teacher of the Law of Love", would have them do. Would he side with Moses and the strict interpretation of the Law, allowing them to stone her to death? If so, then they could have reported him to the Roman officials who had forbidden the Jews from carrying out any form of capital punishment on their own since the year 30 AD. Or, would Jesus deny the Law and Moses in this instance, and in doing so, be branded a blasphemer? Jesus finally declares his shocking response to their challenge by agreeing that they should indeed stone her, but adds that the first person to cast a stone was to be the one among them who had never sinned. Execution by stoning was a communal affair - everyone had to participate, or the sentence would be commuted. Jesus knew that anyone who would cast a stone, thereby claiming that they were without sin, would have been shamed by the community.

**Woman** We can imagine the gentle and consoling tone as Jesus calls her "woman," which is a term of endearment that Jesus also uses in addressing his own mother Mary. The title "woman", as it was used here, translates as "my dear one." It would have been an unexpected term of affection that would have conveyed comfort to the woman exposed in her sin. "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" Jesus asks these two questions without making eye contact, a way of honoring the woman. He reinforced this message of respect and honor by assuring her that he would not condemn her either. She was free to leave, having heard his counsel and direction to sin no more.

**CULTURAL INSIGHTS:** What did Jesus write on the ground that day? Have you ever wondered? A list of sins? Envy, slander, sloth, anger, rage, lust... Jesus used this opportunity to remind the crowd that everyone has sinned and that this woman was no different than themselves. They are also in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. Some scholars suggest that Jesus wrote the personal names of the men in the dust. Could he have known these men by name? Jesus knows they set the woman up so they could bring their accusation that morning. She is just a pawn in their vicious game to attack him. Maybe Jesus didn't write anything at all, and his distracting gesture is only meant to save face for a woman in the presence of her accusers. This simple, direct, and effective action gives him time to come up with a plan, to turn the tables on the accusers, and liberate the woman from her shame. Consider how blessed we are to see the merciful genius of Jesus on display in the Gospel this week.

**INSIGHTS INTO MEANING:** "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." The woman heard these last words from Jesus at the conclusion of her early morning ordeal. The horror and trauma of the previous hours, complete with the possibility of being stoned to death, had come to a blessed end. In all the time Jesus engaged with her and her accusers, he never made eye contact. He honors her in a time of shame and leaves her with these gentle words of counsel. They are words we all need to hear, especially in the season of Lent. These words of Jesus echo in words we hear in the sacrament of Reconciliation. After we acknowledge and confess our sins, we trust that all of those sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:8-9). Then, we do well to remember Jesus's words to this woman. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore." Take a few moments to pray for the grace you need to turn away from sin and toward God and his unending and merciful love this week.

# Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME  
AND IN THE WORLD



**QUESTION OF THE WEEK:** As a family, talk about times when you have shared an experience of "endless bliss". What brought it about? How might love or forgiveness have contributed to bringing it about?

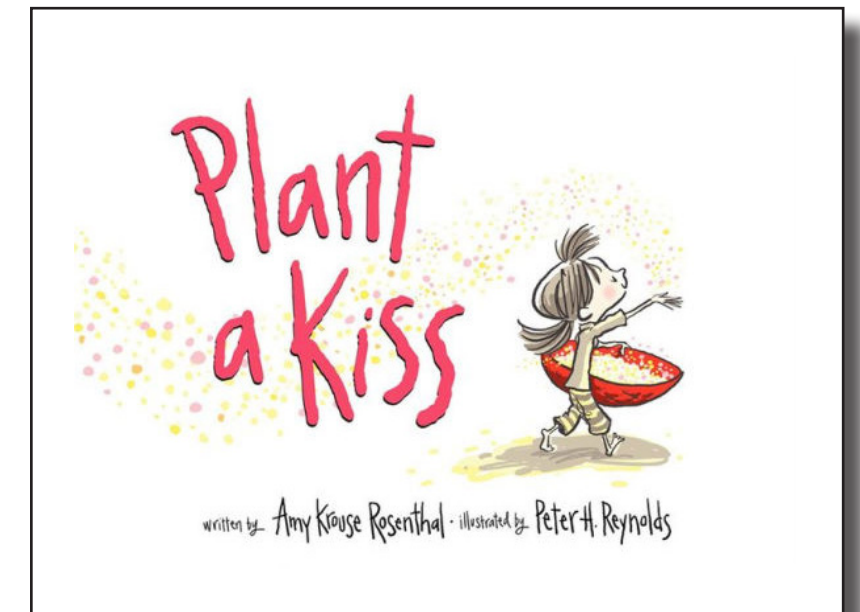
**GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES:** HUMILITY  
THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

**FAMILY ACTIVITIES:** Learn about the prison system in the United States, and compare it to other prison systems around the world. How can we help care for the accused with the love and mercy that Jesus teaches? How can we ease their pain and grow their dignity as children of God? Discuss how double standards might be in play with the justice system in our society. How and when does "following the law" have its limits? How would Jesus handle the today's difficult societal situations? Brainstorm together how your family might reach out to someone who is hurting, and turn their pain into love and bliss. As Christians, how can we carry the Good News of the Gospel message out into the world? How could it make a difference?

CYCLE C 5TH SUNDAY  
OF LENT

# Living Grace

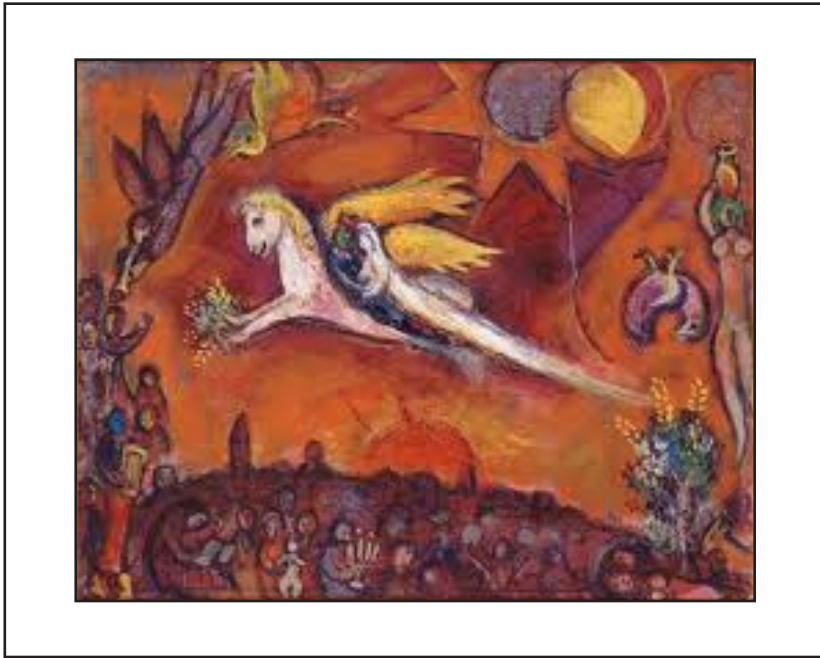
"FORGIVENESS & JOY ARE  
INSEPARABLE FRIENDS"



*In **Plant a Kiss**, one small act of love blooms into something bigger and more dazzling than Little Miss could have ever imagined in this journey about life, kindness, and giving. After "Little Miss planted a kiss" (she digs a hole and kisses the soil), the girl waters her planting and waits, at first patiently, and then with "doubt" and a "pout." At last her kiss sprouts, and a swirling fountain of polka dots and glitter emerges! The other children "stare and stare" in amazement. They wonder what she will do next, and she declares that she will share! They discourage her from doing such a frivolous thing - if she shares it all, she will have nothing left for herself - but she doesn't care! Carrying her shimmering kisses in a bowl, the girl shares them generously with others until her supply is depleted. She gets a big surprise when she returns to her garden and sees a fountain of kisses rising from the ground, more vivid and sparkly than ever!*

# Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION  
OF SACRED ART



*SONG OF SONGS IV ~ LE CANTIQUE DES CANTIQUES IV*  
Gouache painting by Marc Chagall ~ 1958  
Musee National Marc Chagall ~ Nice, France

## EXPLORING THE ART:

## PASSIONATE IMAGERY

This painting is one of a collection of paintings by Chagall that beautifully illustrates the Song of Songs, a book from the Old Testament, that is a love poem between a man and a woman. The Song celebrates love and sexual desire between a bride and groom who delight in one another's physical beauty and the joys of conjugal love in marriage. The Song is very sensual, but delicately presented. This book of the Bible does not give us detailed history or theology, but through allegory, reveals the passionate love of God for his people. If we understand God's covenant with his people as a marriage covenant, then we can see God as Groom and his people as Bride. The Song illustrates how God's love for us is as intense as the love of a Groom for his Bride, and that even the most intense human love is merely a dim reflection of God's perfect love.

Rather than illustrating the metaphors in the text, Chagall visually captures the spirit of the verses. The use of movement, intense colors, and Surrealism (a style of art intended to open the creative potential of the subconscious mind by using unexpected or impossible juxtapositions - like the flying horse, blue faced harpists, and upside down birds) dramatically reinforces the passion and intensity of the scripture.

# Sunday Gospel

JOHN 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them.

Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle.

They said to him, "Teacher, 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 said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger.

But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them,

"Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again he bent down and wrote on the ground.

And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders.

So he was left alone with the woman before him.

Then Jesus straightened up and said to her,

"Woman, where are they?

Has no one condemned you?"

She replied, "No one, sir."

**Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you.**

**Go, and from now on do not sin any more."**

Read-aloud video link:

**PLANT A KISS**

Written by Amy Krouse Rosenthal & Illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds

# Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

## A LOVE INITIATED BY GOD, AND FORGIVENESS, WILL SET US FREE

In both stories today, people "gather about" and "stare and stare" for very different reasons - or so it seems. The religious leaders were always trying to trick Jesus, so they seized an opportunity to shame him by testing him: Would he uphold their laws (the Law of Moses), or the Law of Love that he had been teaching? A woman was caught in an act of betrayal. (So was a man, but the custom was to bring shame and punishment upon only the woman.) Jesus wisely goes beyond the accepted practices of shame and punishment. With his heart full of love and mercy for the woman, he turned the tables on her accusers by asking, "Who among you has not sinned? You throw the first stone." He showed them the deeper reality of our shared human experience - the blessings, as well as the struggles, of a frail humanity. Jesus makes it clear that our first identity is as a child of God. No matter what this woman had done, she still possessed the same human dignity as the "dignified" men that accused her. Here, as in many other Gospel stories, Jesus teaches that in all cases, the power of God's love and forgiveness prevails, no matter what the situation.

The men dropped their stones and walked away. They were humiliated, and therefore, humbled. Jesus had exposed God's truth, light, and love - not only for the woman accused - but also for her accusers. Jesus demonstrated that the way to the Father's love is through humility, and the results of this humility are freedom of heart and strength of soul. God allowed Jesus to endure the ultimate humiliation of unjustified abuse, public shaming, and death on a cross in order to give us new life! Jesus was a wisdom teacher. His way offers so much more than the blame and shame of culture, society, and misguided religious leaders. The men were in a prison of judgment, and the woman was in a prison of shame. Everyone walked away from this scene in this Gospel humbled, yet free to see that God's love breaks through judgment and shame, and brings all of us to a higher ground.

The woman in the Gospel was brought to Jesus shamed and accused, but she left forgiven and freed. Her life begins again. The Gospel doesn't tell us what happens next, but our children's story can help us imagine. As the woman experienced Jesus' love and the mercy of the community, her response had to have been to dance with joy and share it! A little girl believes in love so much that she plants a kiss, so love will grow. In Jesus' care for the accused woman, he plants a kiss of God's unconditional love. Like the little girl, Jesus got on his knees and waited. She waits, and so does he, for love to grow.

No one gathered at this scene in the Gospel would have expected these men to find mercy in their hearts. Their hearts were blocked and frozen with judgment, but Jesus made them realize that they, too, had given in to their own temptations, darkness, and vulnerability, just as the woman they were accusing. Only when we drop our stones, can love and forgiveness begin to flow and to grow. The humility we experience, through God's love and mercy for our own failings and mistakes, gives us the compassion and strength to show love and mercy to others. "...As we forgive those who trespass against us..." This is what Jesus called the hard-hearted men to do, and this is what he wants for us. We might lose patience with God or ourselves, and want to give up, but God always responds with love and mercy - even when we "doubt and pout". When we truly recognize and fully experience this kind of endless love, our hearts are opened, and we can't help but share it "to and fro, high and low, rain or snow"!

**By taking action in faith and with hope, and not giving in to doubt even when it took a long time to see any growth, one Little Miss shares endless bliss! How can we be changed by the "endless bliss" of God's love like the hard-hearted men in the crowd that day? How can we care? How can we share?**

# Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

**YOUR STORY:** Have you ever loved something so much that you wanted to share it with everyone you met? What do you think motivates us to want to share something wonderful?

Have you ever been in a crowd of people that bullied someone? How did you feel? What did you do?

**THE CHILDREN'S STORY:** Why did the little girl want to plant a kiss? What was she filled with that she had to share? Once the kiss grew, why did everyone come to see it? Why did they stare? Who responded like Jesus did in the gospel story? Who was like the accused woman? Who responds like the elders? Why?

**THE GOSPEL STORY:** In our Gospel story, who is the most like Little Miss? Why? What do the elders try to do to Jesus by bringing forth the accused woman? What do they want to do to the woman? How does Jesus plant a kiss in the Gospel story? What are the results? What can we learn from the actions of Jesus and Little Miss about dealing with people who have made mistakes? What can we learn from about dealing with people who want to put blame on others? What is the response of both crowds when they experience a great love?

**What does "endless bliss" look like for you? How can you help other people experience "endless bliss"?**