

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki' Sermon
9/27/09 "Love and Law" John 8:1-11

Christian faith is rooted in the conviction that God in Christ accepts us as we are totally and unqualifiedly.

This unconditional love does not lead us to complacency. Rather, it empowers us to discipline ourselves in all areas of human life.

Let us examine the Christian understanding of divine love and human responsibility in the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery, which was read earlier.

In biblical times, adultery was considered as one of the most heinous crimes human beings could ever commit. Its only possible penalty was death.

One day the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. They asked him, "Teacher, the law of Moses commands us to stone her to death. What would you say to that?"

Had Jesus said they should stone her, they would have said, "What happened to love and mercy you have been preaching about?" Had Jesus said they should let her go, they would have said, "Do you have no respect for the laws of our fathers?"

Jesus' answer is well known. "If anyone of you is without sin, let that person be the first to throw a stone at her." The Pharisees were speechless. Gradually they started disappearing one by one.

Finally only Jesus and the woman were left. Jesus asked her, "Woman, has no one condemned you?" She answered, "Sir, no one." He said to her, "Go now and sin no more."

The Pharisees wanted to stone the woman. Jesus did not. What made them so different?

The difference was in the nature of their love. The Pharisees' love was only for other Pharisees; in other words, they loved only those who shared the same religion, the same values, and the same laws. In short, for the Pharisees, love was conditional.

Jesus' love was unconditional. Its scope extended to the worthless, the sick, the poor and all the despised people of the land.

His love was like the sun that warmed the cold winter air for both good and evil. It was like the rain that fell softly on scorched land for both just and unjust.

What happened to the woman when she discovered that she was included in Jesus' absolute and unbounded love?

To understand it, we need to imagine the depths of her despair when brought to Jesus by the angry Pharisees.

She was not regarded as human. In a few minutes, she would be stoned to death as a disdained and cursed woman.

But something unthinkable happened. Jesus called her "Woman." He did not call her evil woman or sinful woman, but just woman.

In that instant, she realized that to this man Jesus she was someone important. She knew that in his eyes, her life was precious, indeed. She knew that she was engulfed in absolute and unbounded love that would never let her go. She came to the realization that she was accepted unconditionally, unqualifiedly.

But that does not mean that Jesus regarded her act of adultery as something trivial. Adultery was sin. There was no question about that. It was sin against God, against her husband, and against herself. That had to stop.

So Jesus did not say to her, "Don't worry. It's not a big deal." Rather, Jesus admonished her: "Go and sin no more." Jesus challenged her to walk a different path. He convinced her that she had a responsibility to change her life from top to bottom. His unconditional love gave her the courage to live as a true, authentic human being.

To be sure, we are not adulterers. But we have sleepless nights because our consciences are troubled. We are haunted by malicious thoughts and unkind desires.

In those moments, let us look up to Jesus. We will hear him say to us as did that woman, "I know your anguish. I know your inner turmoil. I will hold your hand. So you can start anew. I will gently guide you. So you can live anew. You are my precious one. God is giving you the second chance."

Thanks be to God.

