

UNASHAMED SERIES

**UNASHAMED – IMPACT
JOHN 8:2-11**

The Primary School I attended changed from the old perfect system to having a student council.

Years 4-6 each elected four rep's.

The council met together for a lunchtime every three weeks to discuss concerns.

Pressing issues.

And ways.

That we could make the school a better place.

We made critical decisions like.

What lollies should be available from the tuckshop.

And whether you could buy them at morning smoko and lunch.

We discussed and debated.

What Year had priority for the prime real estate on the playground.

I was elected to the student council in Year 4.

And I was pumped.

I was determined to represent the concerns of my classmates.

And make Oxley Park Primary School the greatest educational institution on the planet.

And so.

I came to me first student council meeting with both barrels loaded.

When the teacher asked if there were any concerns.

I shot my hand into the air.

Ready to express a concern that had bothered me and my mates for well over a year.

One that we were.

One that I was certain.

Was on the mind of every boy in the school.

And so.

When the teacher called my name.

And asked what my concern was.

I said...

“I think that there should be doors on the stalls in the boys’ toilet block.”

Profound, right?

Absolutely necessary?

A must?

A righteous request?

I mean.

Who wants to do their business in a cubicle without doors for everyone to see?

For a moment the room was silent.

It was a pregnant pause.

That I was sure would soon erupt with great applause from my fellow councillors.

Well.

The room did erupt.

Not with applause.

But with laughter.

The girls giggled.

Rolled their eyes.
And turned their faces away from me.
Like they couldn't bear the sight of me.

And the boys pointed their fingers at me.
Laughed.
And began to call me names.

“Potty boy.”
“Stinky Mickey.”

It suddenly got very hot in that room.

I felt tears sting my eyes.
But I wouldn't let them fall.

I wouldn't give my fellow councillors one more thing to tease me about.

The teacher thanked me for my suggestion.
And graciously asked for another suggestion.

But I couldn't move on.
I just wanted the earth to swallow me up.
To cover me.
To hide me.

While I didn't have a name for what I was feeling back then.
I know now that it was **shame**.
And for the rest of that school year.
I never said another word in a student council meeting.

I'd be willing to bet.
That every one of us.
Has a story like that one.

A moment.
That led you to believe not only.
That **you did something bad.**
But that **you are bad.**

And that's.
The difference.
Between guilt and shame.

Guilt focuses on behaviour.

It leads us to say...
"I'm sorry.
I made a mistake."

But shame.
Focuses on the self.

It leads us to say...
"I'm sorry.
I am a mistake."

Guilt.
Has the power.
To direct us back.
To the kind of behaviours we want to live.

Guilt.
Can be a helpful thing.

But shame.
Shame.
Has the power.
To diminish us.

Shame.

Causes us.
To hide ourselves.

Remember the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

We talked about it last week.

Do you remember how they responded when they ate the forbidden fruit?

They realised.
That they were naked.
And vulnerable.
And so they covered themselves because they were.

And what happened next?

They hid from God.

That's what shame does.

First.

It distorts our identity.
As the beloved and forgiven children of God.

And then.
It causes us to hide ourselves.

To wear masks of false identity.
Pretending to be something.
Or someone.
We're not.

To refuse to risk vulnerability.
And reveal our true selves.

In other words.

Shame hinders us from the very thing we were created for.

Connection.

Relationship.

Community.

Shame stops us from having an intimate connection with God.

And with others.

No wonder.

Shame.

Is highly correlated with addiction.

Depression.

Violence.

Bullying.

Eating disorders.

And suicide.

As we continue our sermon series entitled “**Unashamed**”.

We’re going to focus on our Gospel from **John 8:2-11**.

It’s a painful story to hear.

But one that shows us the way beyond shame.

John tells us.

That this story happens during an annual religious celebration.

Called the Feast of Tabernacles.

Every year.

Religious pilgrims from all over the region.

Would make their way to Jerusalem.

And set up tents.

As a way of remembering their 40 years of wilderness wandering.

After God set them free from their slavery in Egypt.

While this was a religious celebration.

It also included lots and lots of feasting and drinking.
And so it isn't hard to imagine.
That someone.
After a few too many glasses of wine.
Might stumble into a stranger's tent.
And do things they wouldn't do sober.

Maybe that's what happened to the woman in today's story.

The religious leaders don't really care about this woman.
They're out to trap Jesus.

The Jewish law said.
That a woman caught in adultery should be stoned to death.

But the Romans prohibited the religious leaders from executing anyone.

So.

The religious leaders ask Jesus what should be done.
Thinking that they've got him cornered.
In a no win situation.

There's a lot going on in this powerful story.
But I want us to focus on two things.

First.

The religious leaders walked away.
Because Jesus brought to light an important truth.

We all blow it.

We all.
Do and say things.
That we regret.

Things we wish we could take back.

Ever one of us.
And the reason that that matters in relationship to shame.
Is that.
Shame often shrinks our focus.
Until all we can see is ourselves.
And our failures.
And our sin.

We forget.
That failure.
That sin.
Is a part of the human condition.

Our failures.
Our sins.
Don't make us "**less than**" anyone else.
They simply *make* us human.

Second.
Notice how Jesus interacted with the woman.

He meets her where she is.

He acknowledges her sin
But he doesn't condemn her for it.

He doesn't diminish.
Or shame her.

Instead.
He sets her free.

To the religious leaders.
This woman's sin made her unworthy to live.

To Jesus.

It just made her one more person who stumbled.
And needed to be picked up again.

Shame comes from many places in our lives.

It often begins in our homes.
In the way we were parented.
And in the way we interpreted our parents' words and actions.

Shame comes from our peers who judged us.
Or ridiculed us.
Or abandoned us.
Over something we did or said.

And far too often shame has come from religion.
From the church.
From God's family.

Too often.
We've acted more like the religious leaders in this story.
And not often enough like Jesus.

I think of Terry.
A waitress I knew who got pregnant at 17.
On a Sunday morning the pastor made her stand up.
Condemned her before the congregation.
And had the welcomers.
The ushers.
Escort her out of the building.

Terry was in her late 50's when she told me that story.
She hasn't set foot in a church since that day.

I think of Tracy.
Who, as a teen.
Got addicted to drugs.

And then entered a life of prostitution to support her habit.
By the grace of God.
She got into treatment for chemical dependency.
And got out of the sex trade.

But the day she found the courage to return to her home congregation.
She wasn't celebrated for her recovery and redemption.
But she was shamed for the way she dressed.
She never returned to that church.

Judgement.
Finger pointing.
Allegation.
Condemnation.
Attack.

Don't heal people.

They only drive people more deeply into shame.

Empathy.
Compassion.
Love.
They are the gifts that heal us.
And give us the courage not to hide.

As the body of Jesus Christ.
As the hands.
The feet.
The heart.
Of Jesus in the world.
We're called to be a community.
That breathes new life into shame deadened hearts.

And we'll do that.
When we meet sinners just like you and me.
With empathy and love.

But before we extend that empathy and love to others.
We need to begin with ourselves.

We struggle with shame.
And the more we tend to the shame in our own lives.
The more equipped.
The more empowered we'll be.
To tend to the shame of others.

So often.
The people who shame us most.
Are the ones who are lost in their own shame.

So.
How do we tend to our shame?

First.
Just being aware when we're feeling shame.
Is an important first step.

Become aware of those moments
When the story you're hearing in your head.
Has moved...

From "you've done something bad!!!"
To "you are bad".

When your mistakes.
When you sin.
When your failures.
Leave you feeling unworthy.
And unlovable.
You've shifted from guilt to shame.

Second.
Become aware of your image of God.

Unfortunately.
Many of us.
Project the human authority figures who have shamed us.
Onto God.
So that God becomes a shaming God.
A God who condemns us.
And rejects us.
When we fail.

But.
That isn't the God who has been revealed in the life.
And death.
And resurrection of Jesus.

In other words.
If you want to know what God is like.
Look to Jesus.

And the Jesus we meet in today's scripture.
Isn't someone who meets us in our failures.
With condemnation and judgement.

He meets us with love.
With acceptance.
With grace.
With forgiveness.

And like the father of the prodigal son.
God always welcomes us with arms of love.
And grace.
And forgiveness,
Reminding us that we are God's beloved children.

Shame causes us to hide.
But Jesus meets us in our shame.

And reminds us that we're loved.
We worship a Lord.
Who knows what it is to struggle like we do.

One who has suffered rejection.
Hardship.
Ridicule.
Desertion.
Mockery.
Pain.
Suffering.

And he doesn't meet us with judgement.
But with love.

And that love.
Starts our healing.

That's what he did for the woman caught in the act of adultery.
That's what he'll do for you.

Amen