

Caught in the act

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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Faith can be a hard road, sometimes. Earlier today, Richard Beck published a [short piece on his blog](#) in response to the question, “What keeps me holding on to faith?” His answer reflects the response that many of us would give, I suspect. **We are drawn to Jesus.** Not necessarily to theological doctrines *about* Jesus or official explanations about what he did and what it accomplished or will accomplish or whatever, but to the *person* of Jesus, to stories about how he lived and loved *in* and *for* the world. However we might have come to faith, and whatever the reason(s) we cling to it in the teeth of so many doubts, behind all of it on some level is the simple truth that the person of Jesus is enormously attractive for many, *many* people.

So, yes, Jesus is why I have faith. Long after my theological positions have been proven partial or inadequate or plain *wrong*, long after the words that I have written or spoken aloud *about* Jesus along the way are forgotten, long after I grow weary of trying to fit everything together into a nice little worldview package, I will still be unable to shake Jesus himself. I am haunted by him. I am drawn to him. I am broken and reconstituted by him, rebuked and liberated by him, brought low and lifted up by him. I admire him and aspire to be like him. I am sometimes frightened and repelled by him. He asks too much—more than I can give, it so often seems. And yet, his is a love and a life that I cannot turn away from and do not want to.

Jesus.

I have written before about how periodically a story from the Gospels will just hover in my consciousness for periods of time, slowly working its way deep into my bones. Lately, the story on my mind has been the one narrated in [John 8:2-11](#). (Yes, I know that the earliest manuscripts of John’s Gospel do not contain this story. It is no less beautiful or true for that, in my view. I will happily leave the battles about this story’s “authenticity” to the Bible warriors.) A bunch of righteous religious folks with stones in hand drag an adulterous woman before Jesus. They are hungry for judgment, whether it turns out to be of Jesus or the woman. And Jesus, Jesus, full of grace and truth, refuses to play their tired games. *Fire away*, Jesus says. *Let loose*

your stones, provided that you are without sin. And they all trudge angrily away. And then this tender moment between Jesus and the woman. Has no one condemned you? he asks. Then neither do I. Go and leave your sin, live the life you were created for.

I love Jesus for his response here. It's a beautiful example of the God who "desires mercy and not sacrifice." I love him for the way he puts those religious zealots in their place, love him for the way he honors this woman and calls her to a new and better life. I love him for the way that he cuts through all the false piety that masquerades as a concern for holiness, but that is really interested in little else than self-justification. I love him for the way that he treats this woman as a *human being* rather than an object lesson for the powerful elites and their religious preening and purity games.

But probably beyond all this, I find this story about Jesus beautiful because it tells my own story, too. This is true of all the best stories in the Gospels, isn't it? They are a mirror held up to you and to me. And it doesn't take too much gazing into the mirror to realize that I, too, am the one caught in the act. Caught in my sin and selfishness. Caught in the thickets I have created for myself. Caught in the broader systems and stories that my story is but a smaller part of. Caught and dragged before the tribunals of truth and moral rectitude, caught with little to say in my own defense.

And how profoundly liberating to stand beside this Jesus who sends my itchy critics packing with a few simple words, this Jesus who looks me in the eye and says, "Where are your accusers?" How deeply comforting and shattering to see this Jesus straighten me up and say, *Neither do I condemn you. Now go, and leave your sin. Live the life that you were created for.*

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