

## Throwing Stones

Deuteronomy 22:13-21 (Marital discord/divorce—woman not a virgin)

Leviticus 24:10-16 (Cursing God)

Leviticus 20:27 (Consulting dead/Séance)

Deuteronomy 17:2-5 (Worshipping other gods)

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (Rebellious son)

John 8:1-11 (Woman caught in adultery)

If you don't mind, and I'm aware Baptists have minds of their own, but if you don't mind, reach your hand down into your right pocket.

If you still aren't minding, reach down into your left pocket.

Now answer this, How many stones do you carry in your pockets?

We never know when we are going to need a stone, do we? Always good to have one handy.

Of course, I'm not talking about having a stone handy so we can skip it across a pond, the Oppie Taylor with his Dad sort of thing. And I'm not thinking about having a stone in our pocket so we can do a little touch up work on the border around a flower garden. I'm not even referring to having a stone in our pocket so we can play with it if we get bored. When I was growing up and we were getting restless the neighborhood gang would have a contest to see who could kick a stone around the block and cross the finish line first.

Yes, there are several things a person can do with a stone. Of course, if you listened to our scripture lessons you know that one option for stone usage is to throw them, hurl them, launch them at people.

But people like us don't do that, do we?

I like to say I'm a liberal Jew trying to be Christian while also being a Baptist. I say I'm Jewish because I follow Jesus and Jesus was a Jew. I say I'm trying to be Christian because it seems the best I can do is try. I say I'm Baptist because that's the steeple I was taken to as a child and as an adult I've hung around because I'm an independent sort of cuss. And I say I'm liberal, in part, because I think I don't have stones in my pockets. Of course, it may be the case that we liberals have as many stones in our pockets as non-liberals. We might just have different targets.

Of course, to speak metaphorically, in our defense, it's hard to know when you are throwing a stone and not throwing a stone. Jesus says "judge not", but what does that mean? Is there a difference between judging and condemning? Is the former O.K. and the latter not O.K. for Christians or liberal Jews trying to be Christian and Baptist? I mean, we aren't suppose to approve of just any behavior, are we?

Yes, I'm confused, and that includes being confused about me. I thought I didn't have any stones in my pockets and then---and then a few years ago I read a story in *The Asheville Citizen-Times* and discovered both my right pocket and my left pocket were full of stones.

The article I read was a front page story in the B section, the "Mountain" section. And it was hard to miss because a picture of the main character in the story, a scraggly looking character, was printed prominently at the top of the page. I have copied the picture and reproduced it on the front of our bulletin. Pull your bulletin out and let me introduce you to this person.

I wasn't lying. He is scraggly looking, isn't he? Little goatee there. He looks like he's doing the Tarzan thing with his hair. Looks like he might be hanging out in a jungle. Actually, I learned he's hanging out in Asheville.

Regardless of his address, based solely, exclusively on his appearance I reach down into my right pocket and get a stone and take it to the launch pad. My first impression is this is not a guy I would want my daughter, if I had a daughter, to date, or God forbid, marry. Can't imagine the daughter bringing him to my home for a visit.

I don't have a great arm, but based simply on his appearance I cast a stone and it hits the target. We do have good aim with our stones, don't we?

I keep reading the article.

I next learn his name. Get this. His name is Ukiah Morrison.

Who on God's green earth would name a child Ukiah? Obviously, Ukiah's parents never heard Johnny Cash sing *A Boy Named Sue*.

Well, I did a little internet search with Google and found out Ukiah comes from an Indian name Yokayo meaning "deep valley".

That's fair enough. And I generally like Indian names, but I don't like this one. I don't care to have any friends named Ukiah. So based on his name I cast another stone.

Who said we had to have a good reason to cast a stone?

I keep reading and I find the evidence, the incriminating evidence, I need to convict and punish. As it turns out, Ukiah is a male stripper. Yes, he is. Surprise. Surprise. Ukiah is gainfully employed.

Because he has the vocation, the calling, the job, he has, I put a stone in my right hand and left hand. Back to back tosses, you might say.

So why in the world was a guy named Ukiah who is a male stripper on the front page of the "B" section, the "Mountain" section of *The Asheville Citizen-Times*? Was it a slow news day or something?

In 1999 the then 26 year-old Ukiah paid the \$5 dollar filing fee and ran for city council. And although he didn't win, and although he garnered only 249 votes and came in 17<sup>th</sup> place, Ukiah Morrison captured headlines all across the United States, garnering attention from *The Los Angeles Times*, Comedy Central's "The Daily Show", and tabloid television shows like "Hard Copy" and "Inside Edition."

Carol Collins, a former city Council candidate and vice chairman of the Community Council for Biblical Values, the Carol Collins who herself has seen Ukiah, as she says, "in the buff" "wearing his G-string and a smile", that Carol Collins commented, "I was disappointed with his candidacy. I think it really cheapens the race not to have a serious candidate. Candidates that are not serious should not file. I feel our filing rate is too cheap. I feel he was exploiting his candidacy to promote his business."

Not that I ever like agreeing with anybody on any Council for Biblical values, but Mrs. Collins makes a good point so I launch another stone.

How many stones does that make?

Who's counting? When you are in the habit of throwing stones you don't count.

I keep reading. I read on and find out Ukiah Morrison's platform for his political career. Not surprised, I learn he ran on a pro-marijuana platform.

That's worth ten stones. (Act like I'm throwing ten stones.)

Sickened by this character, I almost stop reading the article, but for some reason I turn to, flip over to, B 6 to finish the story.

I read that nothing in Morrison's background would hint at what he would become---a \$300-an-hour stripper who uses the stage name "MoJo Risin'. Before coming to Asheville, Morrison did a three year stint in the U.S. Army, graduated from the police academy in Jacksonville, Fla., and worked as a guard in Florida's Nassau County Jail." Not exactly the resume you would expect for a male stripper.

I keep reading. Ukiah has to make a courtroom appearance next month where he'll face assault charges. Morrison said he was trying to avoid a potential fight, and was simply defending himself. Like I'm going to believe that.

Then there was an altercation across the street from the downtown library that left Morrison with a black eye, a cut face and injuries that have put his stripping career on indefinite hold.

Ukiah reflects, "The stripping thing is over for now, until I heal. My hip is screwed. My wrist is screwed. I can't dance. I can't do handstands. I can't hold onto a rope."

Hold it right there. Put it in park. I need to reach down into my pockets. I'm pulling out one stone for the assault charge, one stone for the altercation across from the library, and because I'm

a forty something year-old who because of bum knees has trouble even doing the hokey pokey (You know, you stick the right foot in and you can't get it back out.), because I'm a forty something year old who can't hokey pokey any more I'm pulling out five stones because I'm throwing a bunch of stones at any 26 year-old who is complaining that they temporarily can't do handstands and can't hold onto a rope.

You know, that's one of the main reasons we throw stones---because of our insecurities and jealousies.

Well, there's more to the story, as if we needed to hear anymore. There's always more to the story and we don't always hear "the more". But this is the part we have to hear.

In the next paragraph I read about Ukiah Morrison's tragic life. He shares about his estrangement with his parents. An then he shares about the death of his daughter. And as he shares, the newspaper reporter notices that "Morrison's expression and posture changed."

Morrison says his relationship with his parents, which he would not discuss in detail, has pretty much made him the person he is today.

Wow! I read that and as I have my arm cocked ready to throw more stones I freeze.

But there's more.

Morrison says nothing changed him quite like the 1995 death of his 2 year-old daughter, Angel Renae. She drowned.

I drop the stones in my hand.

When Morrison moved to Asheville, I read that he spread her ashes around Pack Square, and it's just one of the reasons Morrison doesn't plan to leave the mountains any time soon.

Morrison comments, "When I came to Asheville, things began changing for me---my outlook, my name, everything. Pack Square is where I felt---for the first time since her death---that I had something to live for. It is where I felt hope again.

I reach down into both of my pockets and I empty them---I empty them of all my stones. Ukiah Morrison has been hit with enough stones. He should not have any more stones thrown at him.

When I read the Old Testament I notice there's a good bit of stoning going on. Decide to get rid of your wife for some unstated reason or be a married woman and let your hubby find out you are not a virgin and get yourself-----stoned. (Deuteronomy 22:13-21) Curse God and----get stoned. (Leviticus 24:10-16) Engage in a little séance activity and what happens? Stoned. (Leviticus 20:27) Worship other gods (Deuteronomy 17:2-5), be a rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) and you better get ready for a barrage of death-delivering stones.

Turn to the eighth chapter of John's gospel, though, and you find Jesus once again not believing the Bible. The Old Testament, i.e. Deuteronomy 22, says female adulteresses, should be stoned. So make no mistakes about it; the scribes and Pharisees in the eighth chapter of John are just being good Bible believers. The woman has been caught red-handed in the act of adultery and she should be stoned. But Jesus is not the big Bible believer they are. He bends down and writes with his finger on the ground. We don't know what he wrote, but it obviously didn't end the matter. For we read that the scribes and the Pharisees kept questioning him, grilling him. And so Jesus straightened up and said, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."

One by one, beginning with the elders, they went away. No stones were thrown at the woman. She was bent over in a position expecting her death, expecting to be pelted with stones. But when everyone had left Jesus said, "Woman, where are you accusers? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one." And Jesus said----and Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you."

Now a big deal is made about Jesus telling the woman not to sin again, like any of us can stop sinning. But the big deal is Jesus told them not to throw stones.

Are we to keep quiet when people engage in all sorts of behaviors? Well, it's confusing. What is not confusing is that Jesus does not want us to throw stones.

Here's what I've learned.

I've learned I throw just about as many stones as the next person.

Here's what I've learned.

I have a habit of throwing stones at myself, when I feel inadequate or unimportant or not what I want to be. And I've learned that when I throw stones at myself I am more prone to throw stones at others. I've learned that when I stop throwing stones at myself, I don't throw as many stones at others.

Here's what I've learned.

Sometimes my stones take the form of actions. Sometimes my stones take the form of words. Sometimes I throw stones and disguise it with humor. Sometimes I throw stones by withdrawing.

Here's what I've learned.

The journey is long and hard. The journey is too long and too hard to carry heavy stones, to carry any stones.

Here's what I've learned.

The place to start is not with judgment or condemnation or whatever you want to call it. The place to start is with a compassion ushered in by knowing the suffering of another person.

Ukiah Morrison. The male stripper. Assault charges. Altercation across from the library. Pro-marijuana platform, makes a farce of city council elections. That Ukiah. But also the Ukiah estranged from his parents. And the Ukiah who is the father of a 2 year-old daughter, Angel Renae, who drowned.

The place to start is with compassion for another human being's suffering.

In just a few minutes we are going to sing a hymn of invitation. And the invitation is going to be for all of us to put down our stones. But before we sing, J. D. is going to pass out a stone to everybody. Take the stone and put it in your pocket. And as you do so, think about all the stones that have been thrown at you. Become aware of all the stones you have thrown at yourself. Be cognizant of all the stones you have thrown at others in the past, and be conscious that your arm is cocked back and see the faces of the people you currently want to stone. Get in touch with all of that and then as you sing you are invited to come forward to the altar and put your stone down on the communion table.

If for some reason you don't want to do that, take the stone out of the sanctuary. The sanctuary is not a place to have a stone in your pocket. All stones have to be removed from the sanctuary. So if you don't want to put it on the communion table, put it back into your pocket and take it with you, but before the day is done take the stone out and drop it on the ground. You do not need it.