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Fathering Jesus **inspired by John 8:1-11** **by Ralph Milton**

He crouched on the ground, breathing heavily. His eyes pierced through a grumbling group of men, now some distance from him.

It had happened quickly, and only now did the weight of it, the anger of it, come upon him. The danger too, because Jesus knew those men would not forget.

He'd been teaching in the temple, sharing the news about a God of justice, telling stories about a prodigal God who loved both ruler and slave. Suddenly a gaggle of men burst in upon him. They were pushing, dragging, shoving a, frightened, dark eyed woman whom they threw, roughly, on the ground in front of him.

"OK, wise teacher," one of the men challenged. "This woman was caught having sex with a man who is not her husband. You know the Law of Moses. It says we should stone her to death."

Jesus saw the setup. He could see the trap. Jesus had a reputation for being "soft" on street people. Women particularly. Some people called him "a bleeding heart," because he could be counted on to take the side of whoever was at the bottom of any heap.

"Yeah, tell us *wise* teacher," another man hissed. "What do *you* say we should do with her? She was caught in the very act. Do we stone her, or let her go?"

Jesus looked at the woman trembling on the ground. He looked at the hate in the eyes of the men who wanted him dead. They needed a reason to drag him before the Council and have him condemned. If he denied the Law of Moses – if he went with his heart and took the side of the woman on the ground – they'd have all the evidence they needed.

"So!" said Jesus, in a clear, loud and challenging voice. "Let the one who is without sin throw the first stone at her."

The silence crackled. Not one of them would dare to proclaim his sinlessness. Pride itself was a sin. The law was full of warnings against pride. They had tried to trap Jesus with the law he honored, but Jesus had turned that law against them. They were humiliated and defeated by this upstart rabbi.

Slowly, one by one, they left. They knew – Jesus knew – that though they had lost this round, the war had just begun.

Jesus' mind was with the retreating men, but his heart was with the woman, still trembling on the ground before him. He crouched down to her, took her hand, helped her to her feet. "Where are all the men who were condemning you?" he asked.

She looked around. They were all gone.

"And I don't condemn you either. Turn your life around, and you will be happier," he said. "Go in peace."

"I don't understand," said the woman. "Why did you do this? You don't know me? Why?"

"Well," said Jesus smiling slightly, "I had a very unusual father."

He watched the frail, dark-eyed woman walking out the gate of the temple, and in her silhouette against the sun he saw the figure of his mother. The tension of the moment – the memory – flooded in on Jesus and brought him to the ground weeping.

Memories and emotions pulsed through his mind and shook his body. Memories of Joseph, now long dead. Jesus remembered every detail of the day Joseph had come upon Jesus and his friends on the streets of Nazareth. As young boys will, they were taunting those they saw as weak or different. Their taunts that day were aimed at a woman of the village with a "reputation."

"Jesus!" There was disappointment in Joseph's voice. "Come home. Now."

In his shop, while Joseph worked, he talked to Jesus. "You are almost a man now, Jesus. It's time you knew the story. The whole story."

For hours they talked – the man and the boy. Jesus had heard snippets of the story, but never all of it. He knew there was something unusual about his birth. He had asked questions sometimes, and noticed that the answers were evasive. This time Joseph was evading nothing.

"I am not your biological father," said Joseph. "Your mother and I were engaged to be married, when she came to me one day in tears. She told me she was going to have a baby, but it was not *my* baby. She told me she had been in prayer for several days – praying, praying for help, for guidance. Then she told me that the unborn baby was a child of the Holy Spirit – that she'd had a vision of the angel Gabriel."

Jesus saw the tears in old Joseph's aging eyes. And the love.

"I loved your mother, Jesus. I still do. And all I knew just then was that if I did what the law required, she might be stoned to death. At best, she'd have a life of being taunted by the village boys, the way your friends were taunting that woman today. And you would have been called a bastard."

Jesus winced at the word. "Am I a bastard?"

"Jesus," said Joseph with an intensity the boy had never heard before. "I did some praying of my own. Your mother is a good and holy person. Jesus! She may have been the victim of some drunken soldier. She may have made some terrible mistakes in her youth. It may have been God, as she has come to believe. Miracles can happen.

"This I do know. You are a gift of the Holy Spirit. I also know this. Our law treats women so badly, Jesus. We always assume the worst about women and do the worst to them. It is wrong, Jesus. It is terribly wrong. There's a lot I don't know, Jesus, but this I know. Your mother is a good and holy woman, and you are a gift of the Holy Spirit."

The memory of Joseph's eyes – the passion in his voice – were sharp and clear. Jesus realized that in the woman he had saved from stoning he had, just for a moment, seen his mother.

Jesus stood up and wiped his eyes. Slowly he walked toward the garden of Gethsemane where he would rest. He was very tired.

But his mind was full of Joseph. "Well, you got me into lots of trouble," Jesus mused. "But thank you God for such a man – a real man who was a real father."

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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