

Pentecost 3C Sermon 061310
2 Samuel 11:26-12:10,13-15; Psalm 32;
Galatians 2:11-21; Luke 7:36-50

In the name of the God whose forgiveness we are called to see, Amen.

There is a wonderful image in this morning's readings. It is an image of a forgiving God who calls us to see ourselves through the eyes of a Savior.

In today's Gospel story, Simon the Pharisee had invited Jesus to dinner. We usually think of Pharisees as the "bad guys," in Gospel stories. But they were *not* uniformly bad people. In fact Simon, this righteous leader of the synagogue was someone who, in our context, might be equated with a member of the Vestry or the head of a ministry in the church. This was someone who was looked up to by the community as a good person. And this devout man had asked Jesus to dine at his home. In the middle of their dinner, in came a woman whose sin was so notorious that everyone knew who she was and what kind of person she was. I think most of us assume that this woman was a prostitute, but Luke never says that. He simply says that she was a woman of the city, who was a sinner.

When this sinful woman came into the house and threw herself at Jesus' feet – in tears – she created a stir. Stop and think about what you would do if you were having an important dinner party and suddenly an outcast from town came into your house, uninvited, and threw herself at the feet of the guest of honor, and made a scene. I dare say that your response might be even more uncharitable than was Simon the Pharisee's.

What Simon muttered under his breath was, “If this Jesus was a real prophet, He would recognize what kind of woman this is and He would make her stop.” And after Jesus gave Simon the parable of the debtors, came Jesus’ incredibly interesting response, “Simon, do you see this woman?” Although Simon didn’t respond at all; truth be told, the answer to that question was, “No, Jesus. I do not see this woman. Certainly not in the way you mean.”

All of the major characters from our readings this morning invite us to think in a deep and meaningful way about sin and sinfulness and about seeing or recognizing that sin. In the reading from 2 Samuel, we read about the prophet Nathan discussing King David’s avarice and adultery with the man who was a great soldier, leader and ruler for God; but whose sins were legendary. In the portion of the Letter to the Galatians that we heard, St. Paul talks about repentance and forgiveness in the context of God’s forgiveness being a matter of grace rather than something we could ever earn – no matter how much we might believe that we deserved God’s grace. Then finally, we got this exchange between Jesus, Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman. Each one of these readings invites us to think about sinfulness, but when they are read together like this, I think they really ask us to LOOK as Jesus looked; to SEE as Jesus sees; to OPEN OUR EYES to our OWN sinfulness – as Jesus does – and to consider what Jesus’ death at the hands of sinners means in OUR sinful lives.

When Jesus asked Simon, “Do you see this woman?” he wasn’t asking the Pharisee if his eyes worked. He wasn’t asking if the woman was physically visible. He was asking a much deeper and more important question. Simon’s non-answer to this question was, in point of fact, an answer of “no.” Simon did NOT see the woman. Simon saw an interruption by an uninvited and unwelcome guest at the most socially embarrassing moment of his life. What he saw would have been as if you were giving a dinner party in honor of the Presiding Bishop or the Archbishop of Canterbury, and just as the guest of honor was seated, a large, filthy rat crawled across the table and jumped onto the Bishop’s foot. That is what Simon saw happen. He did not see the woman come into his house. He saw her reputation come in. Whatever her sin may have been, it was that sin that Simon saw come into the house. And her sin blinded him to his own.

When Jesus asked His question of Simon, it was an invitation. “Simon, join me and let’s look at WHO it is who has entered your house. Let’s set aside WHAT has come in and concentrate on WHO she is; and who YOU are.” Jesus gave Simon the parable of the debtors to talk about the relativity of sin – not in terms of God’s scorekeeping, but rather because of how much our sins mean to US. His message to Simon is a simple one to hear and understand, but a very hard one to internalize: those who have been forgiven a great deal are more thankful for that forgiveness than are the people who have been forgiven very little.

If we are not careful, we can take the wrong message from these stories. We are tempted to say that the woman came and made a big fuss over Jesus – at which point, Jesus saw how hard she was trying; how much she wanted it, and forgave her sins. Then she was happy. That is not what Luke tells us. Jesus told Simon, “I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.” She had ALREADY been forgiven much and her exhibition of love and devotion then came as an act of thankfulness, NOT to earn forgiveness.

We are never forgiven because of anything we do to earn it. God’s forgiving our sins comes solely from the grace of God. As St. Paul told the church in Galatia, “we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.” There is no earning our status as justified people. There is only being thankful for the grace of God in Christ.

The other important point that Luke wants us to take from this story is that Jesus dealt with two sinners that day. The woman who came into Simon’s home was clearly a sinner. But Simon was a sinner as well.

In fact, there was no one in Simon’s house that day – other than our Lord Himself – who was not a sinner. And the more things change, the more they stay the same. There is no one in this room today who is not a sinner. I would be willing to bet that there is no

one here who does not have at least a few sins in their lives which – if known to everyone else – would not quickly make us as notorious as was the woman of the city.

We are all, indeed sinners. Have you ever “fudged” a little bit on your income taxes? How about taking office supplies away from your place of employment? Did you ever do anything that might have seemed like it dishonored your father or your mother? Have you ever told a lie – to anyone? All of those things are clearly sinful. But we don’t even have to get out of the woman in the story’s alleged sexual realm in order to find sin in our midst. I’ll bet that there are some here who have had an affair while they are, or were married. And I can say without fear of correction that more than a few people in the room this morning had sex before they were married – the name for which activity is technically “fornication.”

A point that Jesus was undoubtedly making to Simon the Pharisee was that sin is sin. It doesn’t make any real difference whether we have had sex with the wrong person – or people – at the wrong times or under the wrong circumstances; or if we treat people as being less worthy than we are, because we are religious and they are not. Under either circumstance – and under myriad other circumstances – we all sin.

But fortunately for us, there is truly Good News in the story. The author of the 1st letter of John said it well,

If we say that we have no sin (like the Pharisee), we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, (the word of Jesus) is not in us. (But) if

(or when) anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the perfect offering for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

Open your eyes to your own sin. No matter who you are or how much time you spend at church, you too have sinned – just like the person with the most notorious sexual sins on his or her conscience. But no matter what you have done in life, repent and be forgiven. No matter what has happened in your life, your Savior is there to save you. Go in peace. Amen.