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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6C)

June 12, 2016

Text: Luke 7:36–8:3

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise,” so writes David, the great psalmist of Israel. When we think of King David, I suspect most of us think about his triumph over Goliath, that towering giant of a man. It's a great moment, to be sure. But that victory is not why the Bible calls David a man's after God's own heart. God's loved David because he was a broken hearted sinner.

David not only defeated Goliath but he also committed adultery with Bathsheba, another man's wife; she became pregnant as a result. He tried to cover it up in various ways but in the end, David ordered Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, to be abandoned on the battle field. Uriah was killed in battle. David quickly married her and all seemed to be taken care of, until Nathan the prophet pronounced “You are the man.” This is what today's OT reading is all about.

David sinned greatly. He was exposed before all Israel as the adulterous king. This scandal would plague him for the rest of his reign. We tend to think less about this part of David's life. That's understandable. It's ugly. But what we also learn about David is that he was forgiven greatly. Real sinners need real forgiveness. Real sinners need a real God who disciplines in love and forgives in grace. That's why David was a man after God's own heart: David's heart was broken. He brought that broken heart to God day in and day out. And God would not despise or reject that broken heart.

For David also wrote, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit” (Psalm 32:1–2, today's Psalmody).

Dear people of God, the Christian Church is for sinners, real sinners like David and the unnamed woman of today's Gospel reading. The Church is for people whose lives are a mess. The Lord Jesus Himself said that He came to seek and to save lost sinners (Luke 19:10). When people complained about Jesus eating with tax collectors and

sinners, Jesus responded by saying, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 2:17). The Church is a place, THE place, for sinners like David and the prostitute of Luke 7. The Church is NOT the place for the righteous, like Simon the Pharisee of Luke 7. In fact, the gospel reading contrasts these two types of people – the righteous ones and the sinful ones – in order that we might know what Christ’s Church is really supposed to look like.

Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to a dinner party. The other guests would be more Pharisees. This is a gathering of the righteous hoping to learn more about this sudden sensation, Jesus of Nazareth. Without an invitation, however, a woman of the night crashed the party. She came to see Jesus. She came in repentance knowing that she was a real sinner needing a real Savior. Luke writes she “brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment” (vs. 37–38).

Simon is undoubtedly horrified at what’s happening. But then again, maybe this is the perfect test to determine if Jesus is a legitimate prophet and teacher or not. It’s He’s real, He’ll rebuke “that, that woman” in no uncertain terms. Simon quickly comes to a conclusion. Vs. 39, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.” What gets Jesus in trouble with Simon the Pharisee (and many other Jews of His day) is that Jesus accepts, loves, shows grace to, and forgives sinners. Or to put it differently, Jesus receives men, women, and children with broken and contrite hearts.

According to vs. 40, Jesus knows what Simon is thinking so Jesus tells a parable. “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” (vs. 41–42). The answer seems simple and obvious enough, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt” (vs. 43). With his own answer Simon reveals that he does not love God, Jesus, and certainly not this woman. The reason he does not love is because his heart is not broken. He needs not nor desires God’s forgiveness.

How one acts, how one lives, what one feels reveals what a person believes about Jesus. Vs. 44–46 makes this clear too. Jesus compares Simon’s actions with this notoriously sinful woman. Simon doesn’t wash Jesus’ feet, doesn’t greet Jesus with a kiss, and doesn’t provide oil for ointment. That was pretty common courtesy in those

days. The sinful woman, by contrast, not only shows Jesus respect but true love and devotion. She will not allow the contemptible gazes and sneers of Simon's dinner guests to keep her from the true love of her life, the Savior of her body and soul.

Simon's actions reveal he doesn't love much for he hasn't been forgiven much. The sinful woman's actions reveal she loves immensely for she has been forgiven immensely. That's the conclusion Jesus makes in vs. 47, "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

The point of Jesus' parable isn't really about the amount of debt; one owes 50 denarii, the other 500. Neither could pay. The moneylender simply forgave them both. He released their debt. It no longer stood between him and them. Both debtors were forgiven 100%. Both could show love in response. The problem with Simon is that he's neither debtor. He doesn't love for he hasn't been forgiven anything. He doesn't think he needs it. And therefore, he shows Jesus no love.

The woman, on the other hand, knows her debt and the release she has received through Jesus' forgiveness. Her many sins are wiped away. She couldn't pay the debt, 50 – 500 – 5,000 – 5,000,000. The number is immaterial for her. All she knows is that her enormous debt before God is wiped away through this man named Jesus. And her broken but forgiven heart shows gratitude and love in ways that are profound and sincere. My guess is that most people, then and now, find her expression of love shocking, reckless.

In our day, it's acceptable to be passionate about hobbies, our kids and family, or even out work. But passion for Jesus, for the things of God, there we must remain calm, and measured. If we show too much zeal, people might think we're weird or something worse. To weep in joy and love for being forgiven, to sing joyfully in praise, to desire God with mind and emotions are so often viewed with suspicion. But we ought not to be afraid. God created us with such human passions that find their fulfillment in Him.

Jesus publicly declares this sinful woman to be forgiven (vs. 48). Simon and his guests chafe at such a thought. Who is He to forgive sins (vs. 49)? Jesus' ability and willingness to forgive real sinners with real sins is what gets Him into trouble. Should His Church be any different? **The problem with many so-called contemporary services...**

The Church is the only place on earth where sinners of every sort receive God's grace and forgiveness. In the Church, there is room at Jesus' feet for any person. To the sinner, you are forgiven. To the morally compromised, you are forgiven. To the criminal, you are forgiven. To the bruised and broken, you are forgiven. To you all, you are loved. No sin, no matter how heinous in the eyes of the world, can separate a person from Jesus' ability to forgive and love. No sin can separate a person from Christ's Church.

Yes, I want Immanuel/St. John's to be known as the church filled with sinners!
Because Jesus can always be found with them.

Today, and every Sunday, Jesus offers you a dinner feast of His body and blood so that your sins can be forgiven. Jesus hosts this sacred meal because of His love and desire to save the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I trust you come in order to receive that loving fellowship and to rejoice in that perfect, divine love. With sins forgiven and with the embrace of Christ's love, you too, like that sinful woman from so long ago, can and should depart in peace (vs. 50) for Jesus loves you all perfectly and passionately.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.