

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 16, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 7:48-50

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49) The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50) Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

Father's day gives children an opportunity to show their appreciation for their fathers. As Christian father's we truly do love our children and we truly want what is best for them. These desires make parenting in general difficult at times. One of the most difficult things about being a loving father (or parent) involves disciplining a child who has done something wrong. The discipline needs to be fair and loving. Punishment may be a part of discipline but there's more to it than that. The word discipline is similar to the word disciple. A disciple is a student or a learner. Discipline also involves learning. When we discipline our children we want to teach them a lesson. The purpose of discipline is to help the child learn how to act and behave properly.

In order to accomplish that goal you have to help the child understand that they have done something wrong. So parents will often confront the child and ask, "Do you know what you did wrong?" After the child explains what they did wrong we expect our children to apologize and to promise not to repeat the inappropriate behavior. Perhaps we have taught them to say, "I'm sorry I won't do it again." And that's where it gets difficult to know how to respond. If we say, "That's OK." It's almost as if we've let them off the hook because what they did wasn't "OK." It was wrong. It's something we don't want them to repeat. A better response is "I love you and I forgive you and so does Jesus." That response also helps to remove the guilt associated with what the child has done wrong. And it's a response that reflects what Jesus himself would say in a situation like that. From our text we learn that

Jesus has something to say to repentant sinners.

- 1. Your sins are forgiven**
- 2. Your faith has saved you**
- 3. Go in peace**

Our text for today is a portion of the Gospel lesson which we heard earlier. Jesus had been invited to the home of a man by the name of Simon. Simon was a Pharisee – a member of a Jewish religious sect that was so zealous about doing what is right that they made up all kinds of laws of their own and added them to the Laws which God had given to Moses. It appears that Simon like most of the other Pharisees had a hard time recognizing his own sins and his need for a Savior. But he didn't have any trouble at all condemning others as we heard earlier.

At Jesus' time people didn't sit in straight back chairs when they ate their meals. They sat in couch like chairs which allowed them to recline with their feet stretched out behind them.

It was in the middle of the meal that an uninvited and unwelcome guest suddenly appeared. Her name isn't mentioned but her unsavory reputation was apparently known by all. (Luke 7:37-39) **When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38) and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.**

This woman's actions required some forethought and planning on her part. She came carrying an alabaster jar of perfume in her hands – alabaster was a transparent stone that was somewhat easy to carve. Craftsmen would carve small containers which would be used to carry perfumes and oils.

She approached Jesus and wet his feet with her tears, dried them with her long flowing hair and then kissed them repeatedly showing her love for the Lord Jesus. And finally she honored him by pouring the perfume on his feet.

Between the sound of her sobbing and the smell of her perfume this woman had managed to get the attention of the guests at the banquet. But no one said a word. Jesus quietly accepted her offering of love and her tears of repentance. The host mused to himself – judging both Jesus and the woman with his thoughts: **39) When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner."**

Although not a word had been spoken the Lord knew Simon's thoughts and he compassionately sought to lead him to understand what had just happened. (Luke 7:40-41) **Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41) "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.**

A denarius was the normal days wage for a soldier or an unskilled labor at the time of Jesus. Jesus question isn't really all that hard to understand – one man owed a lender large sum of money the other owed a significant but much smaller sum of money to the same lender. (Luke 7:42) **Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"** Jesus asked.

Simon suspected a trap and so he carefully phrases his answer: (Luke 7:43) **Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly,"** Jesus said.

Jesus had even more to say as he tried to help Simon understand what had just happened. (Luke 7:44-47) **Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45) You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46) You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47) Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."**

Sadly Simon hadn't even shown Jesus some of the common courtesies associated with welcoming a guest to his home. But this woman whom Simon was so quick to judge did what he should have done and more. Why? Because she loved much. She was like the debtor who owed the large debt. Her debt had been forgiven – her love is evidence of the forgiveness.

It's important for us to understand the sequence of what has transpired. The love that the woman showed was not the cause of her forgiveness. Her love flowed from faith in Jesus. She knew her debt had been canceled. That's why she did what she did. Let's take a bit closer look at what Jesus said: **her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much.** In particular let's consider the word, "for" which could also be translated as "because". That word indicates the basis on which a conclusion is drawn. For example, "It must be hot outside, because he is sweating a lot." The man's sweat didn't cause the heat – it was the evidence which led someone who saw him to conclude that it was hot. Or here's another example, "It rained last night because the ground was wet when I woke up." The wetness didn't cause the rain – it was the evidence of the rain and so in our text the love is the evidence of forgiveness.

The woman's actions were the actions of a repentant sinner who was expressing her appreciation for forgiveness not trying to earn it.

I began our sermon today by talking about how hard it is to know what to say to our children when they express their repentance to us. I talked about how hard it is to discipline our children. I really didn't mention the fact that it is hard for the child to be disciplined. It's hard for them to admit that they did something wrong at least in part because they are afraid of being punished.

But it's not just children who have a hard time admitting that they have sinned. As we've seen by reviewing our Gospel lesson for today Simon had a hard time doing that too. He just wasn't ready to accept the fact that he couldn't do it by himself when it came to gaining the Lord's favor. His actions may seem child-like but they really are typical of each of us as we are by nature.

If you didn't know that Jesus was going to speak a word of praise regarding the woman in our text wouldn't it be easier for you to identify yourself with Simon? Isn't it easy for us to pat ourselves on the back when we read about a criminal in the paper and say, I'm sure glad that's not me? It's easy isn't it to point out the sins of others and to ignore our own. But it's dangerous and it's unnecessary. Such a denial of our sins cuts us off from the Lord's forgiveness. It may postpone punishment but it will not remove it. Only forgiveness can do that.

And so my friends let's put ourselves in the place of that sinful woman – the one who understood her sins and desired forgiveness from the Lord. When we do that the Lord Jesus has something to say to both of us. (Luke 7:48-50) **Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49) The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50) Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."**

The guests at the dinner with Jesus asked, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" The answer to this question is important – Jesus is the one who was sent by God to make satisfaction for our sins. Jesus is the one who lived a perfect life in our place – a life absolutely and completely and totally free from any kind of sin whatsoever. And Jesus is the one who agreed to be punished for our sins for each and every one of them – even those we don't always want to confess and admit. Jesus is true God and true man – the Savior of the world who died for our sins and who conquered death with his resurrection from the dead.

And so when Jesus says – your sins have been forgiven they really are forgiven. No doubt the woman who visited Jesus at Simon's house must have wondered if her sins could ever be forgiven. No matter what she would do there would always be those who would speak of her as that sinful woman – how could she be sure of her forgiveness? She could be sure because Jesus told her it was so and he's the one who made it possible. Her faith received what God had already decreed in heaven – the forgiveness of her sins. Christ's words of absolution announcing her forgiveness assured her of that forgiveness.

And how can we be sure of forgiveness – one of the ways is to hear someone announce that forgiveness to us as happens each week in our worship services. The Lord Jesus assures us that our sins are forgiven as our pastor speaks to us in his name.

These words of absolution or forgiveness strengthen our faith and encourage us. Faith accepts the forgiveness Jesus earned for us and takes it as our own. Through faith we are saved – rescued from great danger. Our salvation is an accomplished fact. No longer do we need to be afraid of God's wrath, no longer do we need to be afraid of God's punishment and no longer do we need to try to cover up or hide our sins -- as far as God is concerned our sins have been separated from us as far as the east is from the west.

We are at peace – peace with our conscience, peace with God and so we go in peace to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – gladly setting aside our sinful ways for the sake of him who died that we might live forever.

Dear friends – the Lord Jesus is your Savior – hide your sins no more, hang on to them no more, set them aside – for your debt to God has been canceled.

What more comforting words could we ever hope to hear than the words of Jesus – Your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you, go in peace. Dear children of God – no matter how old you are, no matter what you have done, your sins have been paid for.

As you go in peace – may your love for your Savior be reflected in your lives – as you eagerly seek to live according to his will and as you seek to express your appreciation for all he has done for you with your acts, deeds, words, works and gifts of praise. Amen.