

Epworth Chapel on the Green
June 16, 2013
Pentecost 4
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

2 Samuel 11:26-12:15
Psalm 32:1-8
Galatians 2:11-21
Luke 7:36-50

The story that Luke tells in our Gospel lesson today is one of my favorite stories in all of the New Testament. I actually like Mark's version of the story better, but for today we have Luke as our preacher, so we listen to him.

This story is filled with irony, which would be one possible way of preaching it. For example, it is ironic that this prominent *man*, a leader of his community, invites Jesus to a dinner party, but when Jesus arrives he shows him none of the common courtesies appropriate for such an occasion. Instead, the only genuine hospitality offered to Jesus is shown by this uninvited *woman* who crashes the party.

Or consider the irony in Simon's statement that *if* Jesus were a legitimate prophet, he would know and discern what kind of person this woman really is. But as Jesus demonstrates by the story he tells, not only does he truly know about this woman, he also knows the heart and mind of his host, Simon.

But although the irony in this text is significant, that is not where I want to focus our attention this morning. I want to speak to you this morning about *why Jesus died – and why you and I would likely kill him again.*

Now that you're sufficiently awake, let me ask you: *Why was it that Jesus was killed? Why did Jesus die?*

I'm not seeking the deep theological answer here. I'm asking the question in the sense of, *what made people so mad at Jesus that they wanted to kill him?* He spent most of his time doing good, right? He spent most of his time preaching, teaching, and healing all manner of disease and sickness. His life was consumed with reaching out in compassion to broken and hurting people. What is so bad about that?

This story gives us the answer to that question. When Jesus tells this story to Simon, we can see early on that it is a "set up." Jesus is setting Simon up. This story presupposes a prior encounter of Jesus with this woman. And through the story, Jesus observes that this woman is deeply aware of both her sin and her forgiveness, and therefore she *lives* her gratitude. Simon, on the other hand, doesn't act particularly grateful *because he doesn't believe he stands in need of forgiveness.*

Jesus concludes the story by saying, "this woman's sins -- and they are many -- have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

Now in reality, this is the end of the story. This is it. So why does Jesus continue in v. 48 and say to the woman: *your sins are forgiven?* He's already affirmed this. So why this pronouncement?

The answer is of secondary importance. But I can tell you unequivocally it is the *fact* that Jesus says this that gets him killed. It's not his preaching, his teaching, his healing, or his compassion that gets him in trouble. It's not even the setup of Simon here in his own home. ***It's the forgiving that does the damage.***

Forgiveness, you see, implies need, guilt, and brokenness. And there is nothing better than being offered forgiveness *if you know you need it*. At the same time, there is nothing worse than being offered forgiveness when you *do not think you need it*.

(I remember back in the days subsequent to the Watergate scandal. After Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon for his role in Watergate, Pat Nixon would later call President Ford's pardon of her husband "the saddest day of my life." She believed to the end that her husband had done nothing wrong.)

This is what gets Jesus killed. This pesky offering and pronouncement of forgiveness. And truth be told, you and I would likely kill him again. Because no one – not me, not you, not anyone – wants to admit need, guilt, and brokenness. We usually only do so once our backs are to the wall and we are between a rock and a hard place.

Why are we this way? Because to admit our need, guilt, and brokenness demolishes the illusion that we are *self-sufficient*. Ever since the Garden of Eden, we have been plagued by this compulsive desire to make it on our own, to need no one, not even God.

And we get really proficient at being independent. We develop strategies to keep the illusion going. *And then Jesus comes along and offers us forgiveness.* And from the anger and embarrassment and shame we feel at the mere mention of the word, we know he has us. We know that he *knows* us. We know the jig is up. Our pretense is exposed. Our dream of self-reliance dies, and we die with it.

And so rather than die, we kill him. We did it then, and we'd likely do it again. We are Simon, we are Caiaphas, we are Pilate all rolled into one.

But Jesus is more than a prophet. He is also the Lord, the Son of God. He knows who and what we are, and he knows what we are thinking. And yet he comes for us anyway. His love for us is pure, and it refuses to count the cost.

But Jesus does not merely die, he is also raised up. And now we are really stuck, because if he won't stay dead, *the jig really is up*. Here he is, still knowing us, still loving us, still forgiving us. He is here this morning, confronting us in love about the delusions we live by. And his arms of love are wide open to us.

As we come to the table this morning, I invite you to take a moment to reflect on Jesus' offer of forgiveness. Realize again what this amazing offer

implies. Then as you make your way to the table, pay attention where you stand or kneel. Observe the person beside you. For you may find yourself standing or kneeling beside this nameless woman, who wiped Jesus' feet with her tears of love.

And if you find yourself weeping beside her because *your* heart is bursting open with gratitude, it's quite alright. You likely won't be alone. For if to be forgiven much is to love much, then this room should be overflowing with love this morning.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.