

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

I Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a; Gal. 2:15-21; Lu. 7:36-8:3

11th Sunday (C)

June 17, 2007 Adelphi

(Baptism & Communion)

We had another break-in this week – the second time since I came! When I broke this news to the session on Tuesday, one elder said, “Well, we are a welcoming church!” It was good humor. It actually got me thinking more about our presence in this community. How would our faith in Jesus Christ call us to respond differently and faithfully to crimes, to sins that we experience?

Let us pray: Have mercy on us, Lord! Save us! Forgive us! Love us! Open our hearts and minds to your grace! Amen.

I gather that mortgage is probably the largest debt carried by all of us! Would you be happy if all of a sudden you receive a letter from your mortgage company telling you that your mortgage has been forgiven, you no longer need to pay any monthly mortgage payment?

If you have paid attention, you probably would remember that I have talked about “gift” a lot in my sermons! In my own personal journey of faith in the last few years, I have been more and more aware of God’s grace in my life. As I have become more aware of God’s grace, I have become more and more grateful for God’s grace. I have realized that everything is a gift.

From the very basic, life itself is a gift from God. Every breath I breathe is a gift from God. Every morning, I wake up to a new day. Each day is a new gift from God. Each day is filled with new graces, with new possibilities. Each day is also filled with new grief and new struggles that will deepen my life and faith!

Every new friend I encounter is a gift. A good conversation is a gift. Beautiful creation is a gift. Everything is a gift. Forgiveness is a gift, too. There is nothing that we do that deserves forgiveness. We are but gift-receiver. We are thanks-givers! (Don Postema)

I have pondered on this woman in today’s Luke’s gospel. All we know is that she is a sinner. Yet, we do not have information what kind of sins she has committed. Later on, we learn that she has many sins. She comes to the house where Jesus is invited to dinner. She surprises everybody.

She brings an alabaster jar of ointment. She stands at Jesus’ feet. She weeps. Her tears are like water gushing out from her soul. She washes his feet with her tears and she dries them with her hair. She kisses Jesus’ feet and finally she anoints Jesus’ feet with the ointment.

It is a very sensual scene. No wonder the Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner says to himself, “If Jesus were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman

this is who is touching him. This is a sinner. How can he allow a sinner to touch him this way?"

Indeed, Jesus is a prophet and Jesus can read the mind. So, Jesus asks the Pharisee, "Who is more grateful? A person whose 5000 dollar debt is canceled or a person whose 500 dollar debt is canceled?" Jesus says, because this woman has many sins and her sins are forgiven so she is very grateful. More forgiven, more love and more gratitude. Little forgiven, little gratitude.

During the days when Bill Clinton's extramarital affairs became public, there were many voices. Some called for forgiveness. Some called for him to step down the office. Eventually he stayed and completed his term as President.

In our denomination, if a clergy commits sexual misconduct, the clergy is severely punished. Stepping down from a pastoral position. Going through counseling. Being barred from practice of ministry for a few years.

I once heard a saying, "The church is the only army that shoots its own wounded." Unfortunately, as a church, we are very much like the Pharisee who often sees someone else's mistakes and sins and cannot see his own need of being forgiven.

Sometimes, when we think about sins, we think of the obvious: murder, stealing, adultery, lying, But remember that Jesus says, we don't need to actually kill someone to commit murder. If we hate a brother or sister so much that we wish that person would be dead, it is considered "murder" according to Jesus.

I know sometimes, people feel awkward during the prayer of confessions. Some people try not to say the prayer of confessions because they feel they did not do what the confessions said. "I did not do that."

I think the prayer of confessions is to call our attention to what we normally do not recognize. On one hand, the Pharisee does not recognize his own sins and his own need of forgiveness. On the other hand, the woman does.

I actually spent several hours reflecting back my life, especially those moments that I had to ask for forgiveness from people around me or from God. I have many sins too. I hate. I envy. I am afraid. I get angry. I lust what does not belong to me. These are sins – in plural form!

But there is something more profound – sin. The most basic definition of sin – singular – is the separation from God. There is a wide gap and distance between God and us. Sometimes, we get closer to God. Sometimes, we walk away from God. Sometimes, it is us who walk away from God. Sometimes, it is some forces in life that take us away from God.

That is why we need salvation. Salvation is to bridge this gap between God and us! Salvation is belonging to God! Salvation is a gift of love from God! Salvation is to bring us home again to God!

I recognize my own sin. I know we live in a state of sin that often pulls us away from God. Being separated from our creator brings pain and loneliness to our life. The simplest prayer that I love most is “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!” “Have mercy on me, Lord!”

I recite this simple prayer when I walk in the woods. I recite it when I feel lonely. I recite it when I feel sad and depressed. I recite it when I feel I am so far away from God. We are all sinners. “Have mercy on us, Lord!”

Fore-given means being given to beforehand – before you earned it, were worthy of it, or maybe even asked for it. (“Everything Belongs” p131, Rohr) Forgiveness is a gift. We did nothing to deserve forgiveness from God. Being forgiven brings new life and new opportunity.

Sin is our separation from God. Salvation is to belong to God again. “To be forgiven is to know God and to know God’s love for all of us.” (Rohr) Forgiveness is to be loved by God once again, like the first time falling in love! “Have mercy on us, Lord. Amen!”