

"It's About Forgiveness"

2 Samuel 11:26-12:15 & Luke 7:36-8:3

June 13, 2010

A long time ago I read about an occasion when a famous preacher had been asked to preach at a certain large church. But before coming the person who invited him shared some information about the congregation. He was told that there was a large group in the congregation that made a practice of getting up right in the middle of the sermon and leaving as though they had gotten the 'gist' of the message and didn't need to stay for more. When it came time for this preacher to deliver his message he began by saying; This morning I am going to address two groups of people. First I will speak to the sinners and then you can leave - after that I will speak to the saints."

No one left early.

No one likes to be identified as a sinner - yet we all are and we know it. One article that I read said that 'the most basic fact about human beings is that we are sinners. Our most desperate need is for a savior - and nothing else will do. -- If a person goes to a psychiatrist, what does he become but a more well adjusted sinner. Go to a doctor and you may be a healthier sinner. Achieve wealth and you will be an affluent sinner. Become a member of a church and you can be a religious sinner. But in repentance and faith as we stand at the foot of the cross we become a new creation - saints in the eyes of God - forgiven sinners.'

A Sunday School teacher asked her class, "Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can receive forgiveness for sin?" There was a long pause before one hand went up. Way in the back of the class the student answered tentatively, "Sin."

The constant theme in the scriptures today is sin - it is the thing that stands out and which we see first [almost to the exclusion of everything else. The greatest King in the history of the nation of Israel, David, was trapped in sin and suffered for it - we can all see it even though it seems as though he did not [at least he did not want to acknowledge it]. The Psalm speaks of sin. The second lesson refers to all gentiles as sinners. And the Gospel tells an intriguing account of a woman who comes to Jesus - she is identified simply as one who is known to all as a sinner. --- But is that what the texts are about? No - we see the sin so easily - but the texts are about forgiveness.

It is often fascinating to speculate about things that the scripture texts do not tell us. Thinking about the Gospel text I wondered 'why does a person come to Jesus or invite Him into any portion of their lives?' Jesus was invited by the Pharisee to come to dinner -- why? Often the Pharisees were simply out to trap Jesus, but that doesn't seem to be the case here. It is more likely, since this is at the beginning of Christ's ministry that this was simply a situation of curiosity. He had probably heard Jesus speak and wanted to discuss the finer points of theology. It was clearly not out of overwhelming respect or awe. He is a very

religious man but doesn't even bother to extend the normal courtesies to his guest, Jesus. As was the custom of those days, they were reclining around the table when the uninvited woman arrives - coming to see Jesus. Her motivation for coming to Jesus is totally different. She knows she is a sinner - she doesn't need to be told or even to suffer the disapproving looks of the 'self righteous' Pharisees to know that. Still she comes to Jesus. She didn't need a lecture on morality from Jesus and didn't get one - I don't know if she knew that Jesus would not lecture her or not - and I don't know if she knew that she would hear such a gracious word of forgiveness. But I know that she knew her need and she knew who to go to. Before that gracious word was spoken she came with tears flowing and oil in hand ready to shower on the feet of Jesus her Lord.

Forgiveness. That is the startling message - the reoccurring theme in these texts. David, the King should have died for his sins (he would suffer - the sin is so blatant / so egregious - God knew that and gave us the law to help us avoid the suffering that would naturally follow as a result of actions such as David's). The law would say that He should have died but the word from God's prophet said no dying - the sin was forgiven. But notice the language - "***THE LORD HAS PUT AWAY YOUR SIN***". It is the same language in the first verse of the Psalm: "*Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away*". It is so hard for us as human beings to forgive or to even understand what it means to be forgiven. But maybe this image helps. The sin that had been out in plain sight for our God to see has simply been 'put away', 'covered up', no longer around, taken away out of his sight forever, stuck in the garbage barrel and burned, it is no longer a factor so lets get on with life, the debt is canceled and there is no reason to remain in debtors prison, we have been made just - righteous - justified by Christ.

We have come here to this place in order to worship. But we also come to hear God's proclamation of forgiveness for sin. If the Sunday School student is right that means that we too are sinners - but God's word for us also means that we are forgiven - our sin has been 'put away', 'covered', 'taken away', 'we stand justified in the sight of God through Jesus Christ', 'we are a new creation'.

There is an old Family Circus cartoon that has the little girl explaining something very important to her little brother about God, sin and why is important to stop sinning. She raises her hand and points toward heaven and explains: "After you die God plays back all of your sins on videotape." It's a cute cartoon and probably a good deterrent for young boys - but it's bad theology. It is not what the Bible teaches about God and sin and forgiveness.

Forgiveness happens at the hand of our God - and when it happens sin is 'put away' - the video tape destroyed never to be brought back to mind.

A little boy named Wilbert came home from town one afternoon and told his mother that he had gotten 2 free ice cream cones that afternoon. The mother asked, "How, you didn't steal them, did you?" The boy was surprised and responded, "No, I would never do that. I just went to the ice cream store and asked for two cones and the clerk gave me one for each hand. And she said that I could have them free right after I told her that she could just

reach into my pocket and get the money - and that she just had to be careful not to hurt my pet snake.

There are a lot of ways in which sin happens. I don't know if the boy had a snake - intended to manipulate the situation - or perhaps it is just a cute story. What I know is that sin happens we are sinners. Sometime that is all too obvious and we get stuck on that image alone. But listen closely - Jesus welcomes, - God forgives - sin is put away We are called to live again and walk with our God.

AMEN