

Sermon: 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 7:36 – 8:3 (vv. 48-50)

Theme: The forgiveness of sins

Goal: Jesus is always ready to forgive the repented sinner; it doesn't matter how big the sin is.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: We have two stories about big sinners in our readings today. The first one is King David when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. And the second one is the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet at the house of Simon, the Pharisee. Both stories are illustrated by parables to show what is behind a sinful life, helping King David and Simon, the Pharisee, to give the verdict about themselves and to understand God's plan for the sinners. Both stories conclude (finalize) with God's forgiveness in spite of the big, evident and public sin of King David and of the sinful woman.

We are tempted not to identify ourselves with these big sinners like David and the sinful woman. *"I never committed adultery... I am not a public sinful woman..."* says a voice inside us. This takes us to identify ourselves with Simon, the Pharisee, who thought he was a perfect man. Is it so? How big is your debt: five hundred or only fifty? Your love to God will depend on how much you are aware of your forgiven sins. *"She loved much because her many sins have been forgiven"* says Jesus; *"But he who has been forgiven little, loves little."*

I – The church: a communion of saints = forgiven sinners

We confess in the Apostles' Creed: *I believe...in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins.* How does a

Communion of Saints need forgiveness of sins? Are we saints or are we sinners? Is a church a place for saints or is it a place for sinners?

When the Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner with him in his house, he had planned a meeting of good people, as he considered himself a good person. The sinful woman was not invited and was not in his plan. - This is the way we often worship. We come to the church because this is a good place where the saints gather. Of course this is a good place and we do everything to maintain the good reputation of the church and of our lives. But, do sinners, big sinners, find place here too? Do we come to church as saints or as sinners? Answer for yourself...

Martin Luther said that we are “simul justus et peccator” (in Latin); this means: we are at the same time justified by God’s grace, forgiven and saints; but on the other hand we are still sinners and in need of forgiveness. We cannot despise any of the so called “big sinners” because we are sinners as well. The Communion of Saints must be understood as the Communion of the Forgiven Sinners, who are declared saints by God’s grace in Jesus.

II – The church: a place for forgiveness

I don’t know how the sinful woman passed through the security, entered the house of Simon and reached the banquet hall. But Jesus didn’t reject her. He knows the heart of everyone and saw what was happening in the heart of this woman. (Just to understand how she reached the feet of Jesus so easily, we have to know that people at that time didn’t sit at the table, but they reclined on long chairs at the table (like sofas), as we saw in the pictures of the Gospel).

Due to the secret critic of the Pharisee, Jesus told him the story of the two debtors: the one owned 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii. (*A denarius was a coin worth about a day’s wage.* CSSB) The

moneylender cancelled the debts of both. The question raised by Jesus is: “Now which of them will love him more?” Jesus wanted to show that the one that acknowledged his big debt and was forgiven was much more grateful than the other. Big sinners who acknowledge their sins, confess them to God and believe that they are forgiven by the grace of Jesus are much more grateful than those who think their sins are not that big, even when they confess and receive forgiveness as well.

The church is the Communion of Saints, but it is at the same time a place for sinners who are looking for Jesus, looking for relief and for forgiveness of their sins. We have to be aware of this, not being like Simon, who invited Jesus to his house but despised the sinful woman. We are all sinners and we all need Jesus’ mercy and love.

The church is the public place where Jesus comes to offer and to give forgiveness:

a) At the beginning of the Service we always confess our sins, pleading for forgiveness with God; and we receive the absolution from the pastor as from God Himself. Private confession and absolution are available for those who desire; just book it with the pastor. Jesus assures to His disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven” (John 21:22).

b) The readings of the Bible in the Service proclaim forgiveness. Today all the readings are very meaningful in this matter. - The Psalm 32 was written by David after he was forgiven, as a confession of his faith in the mercy of God. - The Old Testament reading (2 Samuel 12) showed how David was severely warned and called to repentance by Prophet Nathan and how he got forgiveness. - Paul wrote to the Galatians (2:15 - 3:14) that we are justified by faith in Jesus only; this means, we are forgiven and declared saints by faith alone. - And the

Gospel shows us the marvellous story of the sinful woman who was accepted by Jesus and had her sins forgiven to begin a new life: “Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” This comforts us so much! It’s impossible to count our sins, if we have 500 or 50; we are in debt with God and He is willing to forgive us when we approach Him repented and in faith.

c) God even takes care of the sins of our children, as they cannot confess them on their own. The Holy Baptism washes them from their sins and God accepts them in His kingdom of Grace.

d) And Jesus invites us to kneel at His table and to partake of His Holy Supper, for forgiveness of our sins as we receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus under the bread and the wine.

God is so gracious to us that he doesn’t offer forgiveness only in one way or only once; but he offers forgiveness abundantly and daily through the Means of Grace: His Word, the Holy Baptism and the Lord Supper, and as often as we need it. And we need it daily, as Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord Prayer: “Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Conclusion: Just a last thought to conclude: What moved the moneylender to forgive the two debtors? They didn’t deserve it and they didn’t have how to pay the debt. He was only moved out of love for them as he saw that they couldn’t do anything to solve their problem, to repay their debts. Out of love God is willing to forgive all who come to Him repented and believing in the grace of Jesus. Let it be as we believe: “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in pace.” Amen.

