

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

In our gospel this morning we meet an unnamed “woman in the city”, commonly supposed to be a prostitute. At any rate, she’s a woman of ill repute, a sinner. Simon sees her as a sinner, he sees her in terms of what she’s done wrong, he sees her in terms of her not trying to do better, he sees her in terms of her not wanting to do better. Simon sees her in terms of she offends his values, she is making him uncomfortable perhaps he even felt that her actions in his home were making his life difficult. Simon sees her in terms of he is a much better person than she is.

Jesus asks Simon: “Do you see this woman?” Do you really see her? Take a good look at her.

Jesus looks at her and sure he sees her sin, but he sees much more than that. He sees her pain, understands her life, he empathizes with her and feels compassion for her.

I can imagine the look he has for her, a look of kindness, understanding, compassion, a look of forgiveness, all of which cost him dearly. Because it cost him his life to bestow his peace upon her, upon us, to welcome her, to welcome us, to die for her, to die in our place. I wonder if Simon felt offended by Jesus’ words, or if upon reflecting upon them, he felt embarrassed, even possibly repentant.

But this unnamed woman in the city had faith in Jesus, she believed in him, and Jesus gives her love, forgiveness and healing. I imagine it’s pretty hard to build a life on scorn, on derision, but one can build a life on love and forgiveness. Jesus’ forgiveness of the woman in the city was returned as love, and I suspect she in turn carried that love to others.

Simon saw Jesus as someone worth inviting to his table, but not worthy of basic hospitality and courtesy. This sinner on the other hand, saw Jesus as worthy of the very best she had, the very best she could offer. Jesus cites three examples of basic middle-eastern hospitality. He first mentioned what wasn’t offered, then mentioned what was given.

Water for my feet you didn’t give
She bathed my feet with her tears
A kiss for me you didn’t give
But she has not stopped kissing my feet
Oil for my head you didn’t provide
Yet she anointed my feet with ointment

Our woman in the city recognized what Jesus could do for her, it showed. Simon didn’t think Jesus could do anything for him and it showed as well. Simon’s the sinner in our story, oh, she was also a sinner but she knew the need for God’s forgiveness, Simon couldn’t accept that he also needed forgiveness.

Now as you have heard before, we're all sinners one way or the other. We might recognize our sins and our need for forgiveness, we might not. But the truth is we are all of us quite capable of living our lives off target, letting God down, letting others down, letting ourselves down. And that's how we often look at ourselves. You know, I can't tell you how many times I heard variations of "I know God forgives me, but I can't forgive myself." Sometimes it's pretty hard to forgive ourselves when our sin is right in front of us. But brothers and sisters, God looks beyond our sin and see us in our hurt and pain, and sees Jesus who died and rose again for us, who cloaks us with his forgiveness and righteousness. Jesus invites us to see ourselves as he sees us.

You and I aren't called to ignore sin, our sin or anyone else's sin but we are called to look upon others the way God looks on us, to see them as we are seen through Christ. As Martin Luther so famously said 500 years ago, we are simultaneously saint and sinner.

I may have shared with you that in an adult education class at my last parish, a class on Lutheran Saints, those in attendance voted that I was a saint. The truth is we are all of us saints when God's forgiveness gets ahold of us, in spite of what we see in ourselves or in others, it's what Jesus sees in us that is the last word.

AMEN