

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday after Pentecost/Year C
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Text: Luke 7:36-8:3

“Your Sins Are Forgiven”

There is a story about a little boy who visited his grandparents on their farm. He loved his grandparents and they loved him just as much. That summer as he and his sister visited their grandparents, he was given the gift of a slingshot. Johnny practiced and practiced but he could not hit the target. After awhile, his grandma called him to dinner and as he walked back to the house he spotted grandma’s pet duck. She loved that duck. In the boy’s frustration he aimed the slingshot at the duck. He hit the duck square in its head and killed it! Johnny panicked! Grandma’s pet duck... Well, he panicked and hid the duck in the woodpile only to turn around to see two big eyes watching him. His sister had seen everything but didn’t say a word.

After lunch grandma said, “Sally, let’s wash the dishes.” But Sally said, “Grandma, Johnny told me HE wanted to help in the kitchen.” She quietly whispered to him, ‘remember the duck?’ Johnny knew that if he didn’t do as his sister said she was going to tell. So he washed the dishes. Later, Grandpa asked the children if they wanted to go fishing but Grandma said, “Sorry, I need Sally to help cook dinner tonight.” Sally coyly smiled at Johnny and said, “Oh Grandpa, I can go! Johnny said HE wanted to help Grandma.” She again whispered to Johnny, ‘remember the duck?’ So Sally went fishing with Grandpa and Johnny stayed home to help Grandma.

This went on for days-chore after chore after chore. Not only did Johnny do his chores but Sally’s as well. Finally, he couldn’t take it anymore. He went to his grandma in fear and trembling and fessed up. “Grandma, I killed your duck. I am so sorry.” He feared the worst but Grandma took Johnny in her arms and said, “I know. I was standing by the window and I saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I was just wondering how long you would let Sally make a slave of you.”

Now, the grandmother could have punished her grandson and sent him packing for killing her pet. Instead, she embraced him and forgave him.

Johnny finally found himself freed from shame and guilt, and freed from his sister's threats as well!

This story of forgiveness and unconditional love brings us to today's gospel.

Luke tells us the familiar story of an unnamed woman with the alabaster jar who somehow found out where Jesus would be dining one day. She not only made her way to Simon the Pharisee's house but invited herself in. Everyone gathered, including the woman herself, knew that this woman was a sinner. What her sin was is not clear but still her reputation preceded her. Now it may have been one day she heard Jesus speaking to the crowd in such a way that his words and actions touched her to the very depths of her being. She knew she needed a change to happen in her life and she knew that she would never have it on her own. Perhaps he could help even her. And so here she was seeking Jesus in the house of a stranger, uninvited and unwelcome.

It was the custom of the day that one did not sit while having a meal. Rather, one reclined at the table on low couches with their feet and legs stretched out behind them. With her eyes focused only on him, the woman made her way to Jesus and she found herself weeping at his feet. We are told that she wept deeply and in weeping she washed his feet with her tears and dried them off with only her hair. She kissed them and anointed them with the costly ointment she carried around her neck. Luke tells us the inner thoughts of Simon who thought: 'Jesus, don't you know who this is that is touching you?' But much to the chagrin of those gathered Jesus was not concerned about what *they* may have thought about this woman. God's creation, God's child, had risked everything to come to him in order to be set loose and set free of her sin. As we saw Jesus show compassion to the widow in last week's gospel, again today we witness the mercy and compassion of Jesus. He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Both stories say something important about us.

While others did not think kindly of the unnamed woman and only thought to judge her, Jesus forgave her. He did not say to her, 'I am going to leave you in your misery because I know what you did.' Instead Jesus

looked beyond her faults, her weakness, and her sins and forgave her. By God's grace she was given a new life in him.

Much like the unnamed woman we are in need of recognizing that we too sin. We are not meant to be held bound by sin. We fall short in thought, word and deed, in things done and left undone but the good news is that our God waits for us to unloose ourselves from whatever it is that holds us back, that binds us in our sinfulness. The good news is that our God is ever ready to embrace us and to forgive us. We are indeed, forgiven much and loved much. Sisters and brothers, in spite of ourselves, God loves us and gives us strength to overcome our weaknesses and the power of evil and sin.

And we are reminded that we are to share that same love and forgiveness that God has for us with others. If we dare tell the truth it is not easy to do. Like Simon the Pharisee, we are often quick to condemn and to judge others. We are slow to forget a wrong done to us. It is not always easy to forgive others and sometimes it is not always easy to forgive even ourselves.

But thanks be to God we are given this day, a new day, to seek God's mercy and pardon, and to allow God to create new and open hearts within us.

Let us pray.

Good and gracious God, help shape us by your presence within each of us that we might know of your unconditional love for us. Help us always to seek a deeper relationship with you. May we then be witnesses of your mercy, kindness, and reconciliation. Help us to share your unconditional love with others. And may our life together reflect your abundant love for all people. Amen.