

Sermon for Pentecost 3/Proper 6

Forgiveness can be offensive.

Has anyone ever offended you by forgiven you, when you thought it unnecessary?
Or perhaps by forgiving a third party something you thought unforgivable.

Grace can be scandal;

if we think we do not need it.

or if we think someone else does not deserve it.

This is a great problem for Pharisees like me. And like many of you.

We are used to running the Pharisees down.

As in the Gospel of John.

And there was an unfortunate side to their faith and practice. I'll get to that.

And yet the Pharisees were really among the good guys in 1C Judaism.

They were involved and faithful.

They wanted to find daily purpose in the law of God; they want to accept the covenant again and with enthusiasm.

They were like Sunday school teachers and vestry members.

They loved the Lord, read their Bible every day, prayed from the heart, yearned for holiness.

And they avoided notorious sins.

They did not murder or commit adultery;

Those sins that everybody sees and names.

They were respectable.

And respectable is a somewhat dangerous place to be.

Because respectability is the mother of self-righteousness.

And self-righteousness is the father of that spiritual blindness that is pride.

And pride ultimately leads us to put our trust in ourselves.

The is Simon the Pharisee's problem in the Gospel lesson.

He is not a bad guy; likely a very good one.

And thus he cannot think of a reason that he might need forgiveness.

And I can assure you that there is something

I mean, there are a lot of commandments in the law.

What God demands is total; be holy as he is.

Loved the Lord with every ounce of your being.

Everybody needs forgiveness.

But Simon stood apart from that grace, preferring to judge Jesus and the unnamed woman.

Pretty clear that she was not a respectable person.

Likely her sins were of the dramatic, public variety.

A woman who appeared on street corners and in public places, a woman much abused.

Her act of repentance was certainly public and dramatic.
Weeping and bathing the Lord's feet, prostrating herself at this elegant party.

Jesus preached his own sermon on the matter, better than mine.
Telling a short parable about two debtors and their forgiveness.
One greater; one smaller.
And got Simon to agree that great forgiveness ought to elicit great love.
It was great love that this woman showed as she ministered to Jesus.

If a lot of us are like the Pharisee, some of us are like the woman.
We live with shame and know our sin all too well.
Compulsion, even the disease of addiction, feels like sin.
Shame fills us.
People stay away from church for that reason, sure that the Pharisees who run the place
will not understand.
If you are here with a shame and broken-heart, the good news is that Jesus hold you up
today.
Great forgiveness is yours; and you can inspire those of us locked in our boring
respectability.

This was all offensive to the respectable people gathered there.
Jesus said "Your sins are forgiven you."
And they demanded, what give him the right?
His parable implied that Simon needed forgiveness, and we can expect his nose
was out of joint as well.
Everybody left the party offended about forgiveness,
except Jesus, forgiveness incarnate, and the woman, the recipient of great mercy.

There are a couple of grammatical clues in this text to our need to know our need for
forgiveness.
Verse 47: "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence
she has shown great love."
"Hence" an odd word, little used. A sign of the translator's strain.
The Greek particle could be translated "because," giving us,
"Her sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love."
That's not orthodox theology; we are not forgiven because we love but because of the
action of God.
But the more obvious translation of because suggests this;
we need a desire for forgiveness.
God want to forgive, but God wants us to ask out of our love for him.
A deep love of God might foster respectability, but it must foster repentance as well.
And that is in our hands.

Notice also how Jesus says, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

This is also questionable theology.

We are not saved by our faith, but by the grace of God in Jesus.

Yet, this again underlines our part, the act of trust by which we seek the forgiveness of God.

“You sought forgiveness in me, so go in peace.”

N.T. Wright often speaks about doing business with God.

Dick Turnage often speaks about how the Lord worked with him.

Do you hear the mutuality of those statements?

Ours is a God of forgiveness, grace and mercy.

But we must claim that forgiveness for our own.

If forgiveness so often offends, let us not offend such a merciful God by not asking for the forgiveness we need.