

“Go in Peace”

Sundays of Pentecost

Luke 7:36 – 8:3

June 13, 2010

An Irishman moves into a tiny hamlet, walks into the pub and promptly orders three beers. The bartender raises his eyebrows, but serves the man three beers, which he drinks quietly at a table, alone. The next evening the man again orders and drinks three beers at a time, several times. Soon the entire town is whispering about the Man Who Orders Three Beers. Finally, a week later, the bartender approached the subject on behalf of the town. "I don't mean to pry, but folks around here are wondering why you always order three beers?"

"'Tis odd, isn't it?" the man replies, "You see, I have two brothers, and one went to America, and the other to Australia. We promised each other that we would always order an extra two beers whenever we drank as a way of keeping up the family bond."

The bartender and the whole town was pleased with this answer, and soon the Man Who Orders Three Beers became a local celebrity and source of pride to the hamlet, even to the extent that out-of-towners would come to watch him drink. Then, one day, the man comes in and orders only two beers. The bartender pours them with a heavy heart. This continues for the rest of the evening: he orders only two beers. The word flies around town. Prayers are offered for the soul of one of the brothers.

The next day, the bartender says to the man, "Folks around here, me first of all, want to offer condolences to you for the death of your brother. You know - the two beers and all..."

The man ponders this for a moment, then replies, "You'll be happy to hear that my two brothers are alive and well. It's just that I, myself, have decided to give up drinking for Lent."

Odd isn't it, how we can shape the events and circumstances of our lives to fit our perceptions and our self-delusions. We often make life fit our prejudices and desires which accommodate our selves and blame others for the ills of life. We are sinful people, whether we like to remember that or not.

The woman who washed Jesus' feet was a sinful person. Her name is not given. We know next to nothing about her. The Bible says only that she was a woman of the city...a sinner. And when she makes advancements towards Jesus he does nothing to recoil or discourage her advancements. In fact he uses them as a teaching moment regarding attitude, forgiveness, and faith.

This isn't so much a story to scold or shame Simon the Pharisee as it is a story about God's love for sinners, and through and by that love, sinners are restored and granted peace (regardless of the sin).

The woman is named a sinner and a woman of the city. Two designations that would be perhaps the worst a woman can be named or called. The narrative places two people, one a righteous, obedient man of God over against a woman who appears to be immoral and sinful. According to Jewish law and practices Simon ought to be revered and respected, and according to Jewish law and practices the community should shun the woman, due to her lifestyle.

We still see such things today, don't we? The church can be unwelcoming to people who live particular lifestyles, carry certain attitudes, or display disparate beliefs. I am not condoning sinful or wrongful behavior. Only trying point out how we can assume being righteous and therefore justified in our inhospitality toward those we deem as being more sinful than ourselves (not unlike Simon the Pharisee did toward Jesus and the woman). We continue to drink two beers seeing nothing wrong with doing so.

But Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and forgiveness to all who have sinned. The end of our story speaks to that when he tells the woman that her faith saved her and goes in peace. I want to speak about the story of David and show how it is making the same point.

David is shown in the story to have acted in a horrible way. He basically takes Bathsheba and has his way with her without regard to her or her husband Uriah. As the story unfolds, like Simon the Pharisee, David is shown his sinful attitude and behavior. There is no cheap dismissal of David's sin (the child dies, violence plagues his family). But in the end of the story, David repents and his sin is forgiven. This is most clearly seen in the birth of his next son, Solomon. The reason I say this is that the name Solomon is a variation on the Hebrew word shalom. Shalom means 'peace'. With forgiveness comes peace. The birth of Solomon was God telling David to go in peace. In the same way Jesus told the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace," a faith that trusted that God/Jesus forgave her sins.

Please do not mishear me. God does not dismiss sin or wrongful behavior. There are always consequences to be paid for the choices we make. The point of these stories is to show the depth of God's forgiveness. That there is no sin too deep, so awful that it is beyond the mercy and compassion of God. No matter how lost we become, how great the crime, or wrong the act, in God's forgiveness we are saved (restored to wholeness). Hearing this, knowing this, believing and having received this – we can leave in peace.

I don't know about you but to me this is truly good news!

Amen