

Season After Pentecost [Proper 6C]

June 15/16, 2013

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, MD

Readings: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15; Psalm 32; Luke 7: 36-8:3

Grace and peace to you from God – Father-Son-Holy Spirit. Amen

Let me begin with a prayer:

“Like a sunflower that follows every movement of the Sun;

I will turn toward you to follow you, my God.”

What sunflower would choose to keep its head turned toward the ground rather than turning its full face upward toward the source of life? What sunflower would stare down mourning its earthbound roots rather than look upward into the light that says, “You are beautiful. Let me help you grow into all you are created to be. Glory in the light. Stand boldly and shine!”

What do we do when confronted by the Lord of light? What do we do when we stand before the Son of God, exposed for all we are and offered unconditional, bountiful acceptance? What child of God would choose to remain mourning its earthbound sinfulness, envy, greed, anger, despair rather than looking toward the Source of life that says, “You are beautiful, forgiven and so precious. Let me help you grow into all I’ve created you to be. Glory in my light. Live boldly and shine!” These are the questions that confront a variety of people in our readings today — King David, Simon the Pharisee, a nameless “woman in the city, who was a sinner” and us. How does one respond to God’s eternal, persistent, grace that invites us to a life-giving love and way of life?

David was said to walk close to God and truly had been blessed as Israel’s king. He had it all. But then he spied Bathsheba and he wanted her — whether she was married or not, whether she wanted him or not. He wanted Bathsheba — and if he couldn’t trick her husband

Uriah than he would have him killed in battle. David let lust for a woman and for what was not his become more important than his faith, his integrity, the life of one of his loyal soldiers or God. He seemed to have no shame or regret until he saw his action through the eyes of God in a story told him by the prophet Nathan. When David realized he had turned away and broken God's heart he also knew he needed the strength of God's love to pull him back into God's ways, God's light. With humility and courage he asked for the strength that is born of forgiveness.

Simon, who invited Jesus to supper in today's gospel, would also be thought to walk close to God. His position would indicate to his community that he was learned in God's word and faithful to God's ways as set out in Hebrew law. When a "known sinner" humbly throws herself at Jesus feet, anointing him with ointment and tears, we discover that Simon, like David, thought himself above reproach and sin. But, unlike David, when Simon hears a parable about himself, he is full of resentment, not repentance. You can almost hear his thoughts ---- "How dare you compare me to this woman? You dare to compare my sins to *hers*?"

The woman in the gospel is humble and courageous. With her reputation being common knowledge, she had no delusions about the scorn and condemnation she would get from Simon and his guests. Still she risked it all to express her love and thanks to Jesus. Jesus says, "Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love." "*Have* been forgiven..." did you catch that. The forgiveness had already happened. She did not come seeking forgiveness but she comes in gratitude for the grace she has already experienced through

Jesus. Her expression of love is not the cause of her forgiveness but the consequence, the outcome of her experience of Jesus. She knows *who* she is, *what* she's done and she *now* knows Jesus' assurance of forgiveness and new life. She has let the unconditional acceptance claim her, she has let it take hold of her. And it has transformed her. She is NOT the same. She has turned toward the source of life and light. Simon and the others only see a shameless sinner. They seem blind to God's shameless love that ignores human disqualifiers and barriers to seek the lost and welcome the rejected..

When you encounter the truth about yourself *and* the grace of God, how do you respond? David responded to his sinfulness with a regret that was well aware that only God could make him right with the Lord or himself. The woman responded to the gift of grace with extravagant gratitude and a changed life. Simon? "Who is this who even forgives sin?" You can hear he and his guests mumbling to one another about this false prophet Jesus who obviously doesn't know salvation is to be reserved for the few elect, like themselves, who work hard to act right and keep their sinning small and private, hardly worth bringing up compared to most. They have their eyes to the ground. They don't need forgiveness. They don't need saving. They don't need God. They have closed themselves off from the healing, transforming nature of God's grace.

Who is truly free at the end our gospel today? We leave Simon, the respectable and learned, looking down his nose at this woman and Jesus. He is grumbling, self-righteous and trapped in a life that has no room for grace. He's trapped defending his life against the judgements of others and can never be quite sure he's done enough to be worthy of

God's love since he's convinced he must and can earn it. The woman, who has lived much of her life with eyes cast down in shame is able to see very clearly what is life-giving and to whom she will give her life. The woman walks away from this scene a free woman: gifted with the assurance of Jesus, at peace with God, and empowered to follow God's will, not out of fear, but out of appreciation and gratitude. She is freed, like David, to dance and sing and glory in God's grace: Like a sunflower that follows every movement of the Sun; I will turn toward you to follow you, my God.

Confronted with God's gracious, eternal, persistent turning toward us, how will we respond? Unlike the guaranteed, instinctive nature of the sunflower, we *can* chose to turn away from the source of Life and live in our own self-justifying shadow, full of doubt, defensiveness and fear. We can also chose to follow the Lord of Light and Life, letting the One who loves us beyond imaginings transform and lead us. How will we respond? We make our choice each day. There is one more blessed caution the woman in today's gospel might offer us: When you live with your life turned toward the Son of God, be ready for surprises and wonder. Be ready to discover you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and bolder than you imagine as you lean into your calling to live passionately, fearlessly, joyfully in service of God and God's Reign. Amen

Linda M Alessandri 6/15/13