

3rd Sunday after Pentecost C (6/13/10 – *The Love of Christ Is Forgiveness and Life*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Sometimes there is nothing like a story to get the point across. And we have several stories in the appointed Scriptures for the day – some real ... others simply told to help teach a valuable lesson. And together, they give us the whole picture of our life and salvation. So let us take a look at them.

The first story I would like to consider is the one told by Nathan, a prophet of God. Nathan tells his story to only one man – King David; but we get to listen in today. Basically, the story is this: A man who has been blessed by God in great abundance steals a poor man's only ewe in order to set food before his visitor. He has plenty – more than plenty. He could have killed a fattened calf to set before his guest without ever missing it. This rich man is too greedy and selfish to take from his own. He is too proud and desirous of looking like the perfect host in front of his guest to say, "Be gone. I do not want to waste my abundance on you."

We understand why David becomes so incensed at the rich man. It would be like the owner of a delicatessen stealing a street-beggar's half-eaten sandwich ... or Bill Gates taking a first-grader's lunch money. It is just plain wrong! And so unnecessary. Yet, David's anger – and the punishment he would meet out as king – is way over the top. *As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.* [2SAM 12.5-6] Those are David's words to Nathan.

Is it not **often** the case, that we become inordinately upset with the small – almost insignificant – sins of others, but easily justify our own sins? That was, in fact, David's case. And that is the second story – actually the prequel to the text we heard in 2SAMUEL. Long before Nathan came to him, David had lusted after another man's wife, shirked his duties as King, tempted the woman to commit adultery with him, tried to deceive and cover up his sin – first by calling the husband home from war ... then by coercing his commander to place Uriah at the front of the fighting line and retreat. David pretty much managed to break every single Commandment. He

coveted. He stole another man's wife and committed adultery with her. He lied. He murdered. And in doing these things, he dishonored his kingship, his country, his parents, and His God. David failed to love his neighbor as himself. He did not even really love Bathsheba – else, he would not have lured her into adultery and killed her husband. Above all, David failed to love the Lord. He *despised the Word of the LORD* [2SAM 12.9] ... misused the Lord's Name by calling down His wrath upon the man in Nathan's story ... and neglected to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Lest we be like the Pharisee who thought himself much holier than that notoriously sinful woman who cleaned and kissed and anointed Jesus' feet – and you **know** that we are all too often just as self-righteous and judgmental as that Pharisee – let us consider the parable our Lord tells. *There were two debtors to a certain man* – that is the way the Greek reads, if we are precise. *One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.* [LK 7.41] That is the equivalent of 20 months' and 50 days' wages, respectively. What our Lord is saying with this portion of the parable is simply this: we **all** are debtors to God. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* – as the Scripture says [ROM 3.23]. And like the debtors in the parable, **none** of us has the ability to pay off our sin-debt to God! Like David, we have broken every Commandment – if not in deed, then in our sinful thoughts and desires ... and by our sinful words. We **all** deserve to die ... eternally.

Often we do not – we **refuse to** – recognize this reality. We ignore and hide our sins – cover them up like David tried to do. We look around and think that we are the debtor who only owes a measly two months' wages. We think we are better than others – like the Pharisee. We are not like those gross, public, notorious sinners who owe 20 months' debt – not like that woman. Then a Nathan comes along – preaching God's Word faithfully – and traps us into seeing and admitting our sin and the just punishment that we deserve for it all. The finger of the Law points to each of us, saying: *You are the man* ... or the woman [2SAM 12.7]. We cannot escape. I must admit, with David, that *I have sinned against the LORD* [2SAM 12.13].

But as soon as those words come upon your lips – indeed, **before** ...

while they are still in your heart – the second Word of the Lord through Nathan is already yours: ***The LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die*** [2SAM 12.13b]. There may still be temporal (temporary) consequences – as there was in David’s case [2SAM 12.14]; but the eternal (spiritual) consequences have all vanished. The words of David in PSALM 32, appointed for this day, become your own: ***Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent – that is to say, when I ignored and denied and tried to hide my sin – my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*** [PSA 32.1-5] It is especially, now, this last part that I want you to hear and understand. **The Lord has forgiven the iniquity of your sin!**

The Lord forgives all your sins – both the small and the large ... the secret and the public. It matters not if your sins are known to all ... or only to yourself. Christ your Savior has wiped them all away – every last one ... without exception. You have no sin so great, but that the Lord Jesus has paid for it. You have no sin so small or hidden, but that the Lord knows it ... made it His Own ... and took it away on His Cross. Have you broken every Commandment – like David? Every transgression has been forgiven already – Christ took care of it on Calvary. Do you keep breaking one Commandment – repeatedly? Your Savior has taken away your punishment for each and every occurrence. **All** your sins He made His Own. For **all** your sins Christ has atoned. The Son made Himself accursed [GAL 3.10, 13] by willingly hanging on the tree of the Cross – so that in Him you might be blessed, forgiven, and justified before God.

Now here is the thing with the parable our Savior tells. We are **all** sinners – every last person. But we do not always recognize that reality. At least we discount our sin – as if our sin problem were not really very serious.

That is the debtor who owed only 50 denarii. But when we own our sin – own up to it ... see it for what it really is – then we know that we are the debtor who owed 500. That makes the forgiveness of our debt – our trespasses and sins – all the more precious. We **all** have been forgiven much.

And this is the thing with God's love. *Love covers a multitude of sins* [1PET 4.8]. God's love – shown forth in the life and death and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ – covers the multitude of your sins ... and mine ... and the multitude of the sins of the whole world. *The Love of Christ Is Forgiveness and Life*. Out of love for you ... and the whole world – and that is how you can be sure it is for you – the Lord Jesus Christ, in His love, has worked your forgiveness and given you His very Own Life! There is nothing left for you to do to earn this love and forgiveness and eternal life – it is already yours in Christ. *The LORD has put away your sin* – put it away **already** – by the Son's once-for-all work on the Cross. Your forgiveness and life in Christ are **already** finished ... completed. Nothing is lacking.

This brings me to a very important detail about our *Gospel* for this *Third Sunday after Pentecost*. It is **not** the unnamed, sinful woman's great love for the Lord Jesus that earns her the forgiveness of her many sins. That would be a misinterpretation of Jesus' Word: *Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much* [LK 7.47]. This woman's great love for Jesus is the **result** of having her many sins forgiven. Her love does not create Christ's forgiveness. Rather, Christ's forgiveness is the source and fountain of the love she shows forth. For as St. Paul says in our *Epistle*: *we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because by works of the law no one will be justified* [GAL 2.16]. Believing that God forgives her sins, she now loves.

Oh, and one last thing. Jesus did, indeed, know *what sort of woman this is who is touching Him* [LK 7.39]. *She is a sinner* ... just like all of us. She is a sinner who knows the greatness of her sin ... and the greater still love of Christ that is forgiveness and life. Jesus knows **you** ... and loves **you** ... and gives **you** His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]