

The WORD Made Forgiveness

Vicar Lincoln Albrecht—Abiding Grace Lutheran Church—Luke 7.36-50

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It never should have come down to this—tears, and a black eye—but there is no rewind button on life. Two children with active imaginations fought over their house or truck, depending on whom you asked. It was just a cardboard box to anyone else, but to these two it was the best toy ever. The offending older brother hadn't planned on making his sister cry, but it was beyond planning. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry" came out like rapid-fire as if the younger sister didn't hear the first two. But Dad caught the whole thing. He saw the whole struggle that led up to the shredded appliance box. A firm hand on his sons' backs sent shivers down the little boy's spine. The boy turned quickly repeating the chorus of apologies he had tried on his sister. Dad, clearly irritated about having to deal with this after a 10 hr shift of adults fighting at the factory, furrowed his brow and shook his head. **"Son, sometimes 'sorry' doesn't cut it."**

Isn't that how we feel when we deal with one another? Sure we tell kids to apologize out-loud but when we hear apologies from adults aren't we filled with doubts and cynicism? We have heard politicians, athletes, CEO's apologize in staged press-conferences and we question their authenticity. Sometimes 'sorry' isn't good enough. Especially when we are the ones who have been wronged. Then we demand satisfaction along with an apology to make sure we know that they really mean it. Because 'sorry' doesn't fix the problem in our minds.

The woman in our Gospel text had some problems—her reputation in town was one of a sinful woman. Her sin-debt to God was substantial and staggering. But it didn't start out that way—for her or for you and me. **(READ TEXT HERE)**

When we examine our own lives we must realize that we have made problems with the WORD in so many different ways. People look at us and they see a host of different sins.

One is our language—the way we talk. Take our accents for example. Some of you were surprised that I didn't have much of a Midwestern accent. Others thought, or think, that I talk like a Northerner. But to me I just talk normal. Conversation topics and language, like accents, become habit. We never think we talk funny, crudely, or inappropriately. But the way we talk reflects the land in which we live, spiritually speaking. When we walk, talk, and celebrate in a sinful society our language is impacted. People around town hear us speak and see us as sinful men and women.

Another is our lifestyle. Perhaps sin has a place in our daily or weekly schedule. We set aside twenty minutes a day to catch up on celebrity gossip, or a day a week to satisfy our covetous shopping urges. Maybe we look forward to the weekends as a time to abuse alcohol, or Sunday mornings as the only day we get to sleep in.

And the devil is right there to convince us what we are doing is alright, because this is how the rest of the world behaves. Our sinful nature doesn't make us stick out in our world, so there is no need to be ashamed. And slowly but surely we become hardened to our sinful habits. Church attendance becomes secondary to enjoying the weekend. No longer are we shocked by filthy language, lusty scenes, or the gossip of the day. In fact, our sinful nature starts desiring something really shocking. Looking for

anything to recreate that first rush. So we hang around those who use filthier language, surf for more depraved behavior and rumors—all to satisfy our insatiable sinful nature.

That is, at least until we are called to task for our language or our behavior. When a brother or sister points out the sinful lifestyle we have adopted, or our consciences are reignited and burn concerning the habits we have adapted—**then we feel the full weight of the debt of our guilt**. All of the sudden little things that didn't even make us blink, now make us cry. Our sins burden our conscience to the point of inactivity. Now we are painfully aware of the sinful words that have put up shop on our lips and we feel unworthy of offering any praise. Our guilty conscience convinces us that we aren't worthy of entering the Father's house—not after we went to that movie, not after we spent so long at the bar, not when it has been so long since we have been at church.

We don't feel like we deserve to praise this God, not when we have been this sinful. Our sins are completely indefensible both to others who know better, to our own consciences which have the Law written on them, and to a holy God, who demands us to be as perfect as He is. Like that little boy we didn't plan on getting ourselves in this deep, but there is no rewind button to life. Now, we understand what Dad meant when he said, "Sometimes, sorry doesn't cut it."

Because our sorry never would have been good enough—just like it wasn't good enough for the unnamed woman in our Gospel text. We could never express enough contrition or grief. We couldn't do enough good works to earn forgiveness because God doesn't demand us to balance our lives like a check book. We don't get to make withdrawals; he demands deposits of perfection.

And we don't measure up. We are sinners, completely despicable and totally depraved in every way possible. Exactly how Simon saw this woman. And yet Christ tells this woman, who was known as a sinner, that her sins were forgiven. But her contrition didn't merit her forgiveness. Christ didn't see her alabaster jar of perfume and the tears welling up in her eyes and think, "**Well, I'll give her chance to make it right**". Because he knew that he would make it right—and this is why she knelt at his feet. Christ had already begun the work of earning forgiveness for her many sins—both public and private. He silently let her anoint him with perfume, washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair—knowing he would win her innocence back.

Simon, the Pharisee, smirked thinking if Jesus really knew who this woman was he wouldn't let her near him. Simon was smugly convinced that her "**sorry wasn't good enough**"—but the woman knew this to be true too. She couldn't do anything to make satisfaction—but her Messiah would do it all.

The WORD made flesh made forgiveness of sins possible by silently accepting the punishment we all deserved. He was led to the slaughter to make atonement for all the sins that separated us from our heavenly Father.

Christ remained silent as he was accused of a litany of offenses, so that we might be forgiven for all the times our language reflected 'where we live'.

Jesus lived a holy life, one that set apart each day and every moment to earn us forgiveness for the times where sinful activities readily find a place in our daily routine.

Our innocent Messiah made no defense for himself, because he knew that he had to die to pay for all our indefensible attitudes and behaviors. His back was softened by many Roman lashes for each and every time we stubbornly and defiantly stood up for our sinful habits.

You and I, along with this unnamed woman, created quite the problem with our lives, with our deeds and our words. But the WORD solved that problem with his life, his deeds, his words—his ultimate sacrifice, for once and for all. Now forgiveness of sins wasn't just attainable, but won freely for all.

Now our lips have been loosed from service to our sinful natures, from spewing sinful slurs and selfish statements. We have been set apart through faith in Christ's sacrifice and our lips are now worthy to praise his Holy Name.

The guilt is gone. No longer are we kept awake by the enormous debt of sin that we have run up.

Because the Lamb of God has taken that burdened and paid for it, removing the guilt of our sin as far as east is from west. No longer must we feel too guilty to approach the Father's house. But we rejoice on our way to worship, and eagerly approach the LORD's table where we receive tangible reassurance of his victory.

We no longer are slaves to guilt. To those who point out the hypocrisy of our lives, we point to the blood of the Lamb where satisfaction for the guilt of the struggling sinner-saint was made. No longer are we burdened by our guilty consciences, remaining unable to get any sleep at night because of the enormity of our sins. We have been washed clean; we rest secure in the Father's arms knowing that we have peace with him.

Like the woman who entered the Pharisee, Simon's house, our sin and guilt would have us stay outside. But Christ invites us in. Invites us to his side, to place our heads at his feet, confessing our sin, knowing all the while that we have full and complete forgiveness of sins won on our behalf at Calvary.

And like that woman we leave forgiven, rejoicing that the great debt has been forgiven. Looking for others who are burdened by the weight of their debts, proclaiming the forgiveness with their own name on it.

God be praised that he doesn't stand behind us, brow furrowed, hand placed firmly on our backs proclaiming that "Sorries don't cut it".

We know that our sorries would never have been good enough. We could never express enough contrition, grief, or do enough good works to earn our salvation. But that isn't why we express contrition. It doesn't earn us anything. Christ didn't tell this unnamed woman, "Your grief has saved you". But his grief did. His pain, his punishment, his Holy Spirit working faith, creating and building trust in the sacrifice for sins he made.

Brothers and sisters rest secure—you have been forgiven. Christ has silently endured the punishment we deserved so he could publicly proclaim to you and me "Your faith has saved you, go in peace!"

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. Amen.