

June 20th – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost Luke 7:36-50

Wouldn't it be wonderful to live in perfect peace? Every soldier could come home. Every person would help and support his neighbor and say nothing but kind, loving things about others. You would awaken refreshed every morning after a good night's sleep. And this surely doesn't describe our world, does it?

Sin has destroyed the perfect peace God intended for us. Each person wants to live as his or her own little god, and so we fight and quarrel, argue and bully, scheme and connive to get our own way. Gone is peace on earth, and gone is any hope for eternal peace.

Although we cannot make peace with God, God in love promised to send a Savior who would be called the Prince of Peace. He is the main character in our gospel lesson today, along with two others. What can we learn from these three - the Proud Pharisee, the Penitent, Pardoned Sinner, and the Prince of Peace?

Simon, the Proud Pharisee, had invited Jesus to his home. He wondered, "Could Jesus really be the Savior God had promised?" Simon seems to have serious doubts, for he doesn't even give Jesus the common Oriental courtesies of the day. He doesn't offer water for him to wash his dusty feet, nor a towel to dry them. He doesn't offer him the kiss of friendship, nor oil to anoint his head as a gesture of joy and celebration.

Why did Simon give Jesus such a cold welcome? The Pharisees prided themselves on their outward obedience to the Law and trusted that their own right living was the way to make peace with God. When a woman, who was known by everyone in that town for her public sin of adultery, entered Simon's home, his proud critical heart rejected Jesus. **"If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner" (v. 39).**

Let's admit that we by nature are that proud Pharisee. We too would think, "If anyone will get to heaven, it ought to be me because I'm trying my best." How often don't we look down on others because we think we're superior to them? We're good citizens, good parents, good children, good church members. We don't swear. We pray – a lot. We pay our taxes. We help our neighbor. We avoid immorality. We picked the right church – the one that speaks against homosexuality, abortion, and other social ills.

Can we ever find peace by coming to God as a proud Pharisee? The only person the proud Pharisee loves is himself, and he'll never have peace with God, for the just Judge as proclaimed, **"Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy"** (Leviticus 19:2). He has also condemned, **"Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law"** (Galatians 3:10). If we insisted that God reward us for the good we do or the evil we avoid, He would reward us indeed with what we deserve, His burning wrath forever in hell. There is no peace for the proud Pharisee.

What about the Penitent Sinner? She was known around town as the Public Sinner, for she had fallen prey to the belief that you can find peace by satisfying your fleshly cravings in your own way. Our modern culture celebrates sex as though it is the ultimate fulfillment of life. Sex before marriage, sex outside of marriage, sex in books, sex in movies, sex in the night clubs, sex in the way people dress or dance or flirt at the office. But God created man and woman so that through the lifelong commitment of marriage the two would become one flesh. Through that loving union, a reflection of Christ's love for the Church, God intends to create life, the life of children to be loved and reared in a home where dad and mom are committed to the

Lord, to each other and to bringing up their children as God's children. In the marriage union the husband and wife express their committed love and faithfulness under God's blessing, without selfishness, fear, guilt, or shame.

Outside of marriage God condemns even the look of lust as adultery, for it makes the mind impure. The early chapters of Proverbs demonstrate that adultery is a prime example of foolishness. At first it seductively appears inviting, but in the end it brings nothing but regret and shame. **"The lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall...Do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others...At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent"** (Proverbs 5:3-11). Living for any sinful passion will never bring peace – whether it is lust, greed, laziness, drunkenness, gluttony, anger, or revenge or envy. **"Those who live like this,"** the Bible says, **"will not inherit the kingdom of God"** (Galatians 5:21). The only person the Public Sinner loves is himself, and he'll never have peace with God.

But the Public Sinner had become the Penitent, Pardoned Sinner – because she had heard the message of the Prince of Peace. Simon didn't wash Jesus' feet with water, but she washed his feet with her tears, the result of her heart broken by grief over her sin. Instead of a towel to dry Jesus' feet, she used her hair, the very beauty and glory of her head as she devoted her thoughts to Jesus. Instead of a kiss of polite greeting, she showered Jesus' feet with kisses, a sign of devotion as she would gladly follow Him anywhere. Instead of ordinary oil for the head, she poured out costly perfume on Jesus' feet, showing her love and thanks, for she knew those feet would take Jesus to the cross to pay for all her sin. Without saying a word, Jesus accepted her tears of repentance and her demonstration of love and gratitude.

When he did speak, He told a story. **"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii (A denarius is a days' wages) and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"** (v. 41-42) Obviously, the one who had the bigger debt cancelled will show the greater love. This woman overflowed with love because she appreciated God's forgiveness of her many sins. To assure her even more, Jesus said to her, **"Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace."**

One of the deepest hungers we have is the hunger for peace with God. Only His love can reach down into our hearts to quiet our haunted, accusing consciences and bring us the message of pardon and peace. He conceived the plan of salvation which made pardon and peace possible. Jesus, His eternal Son, lived in perfect peace with God and man to make up for all our hostility, rebellion, and sin. He died in shame, suffering the horror of hell to pay for the guilt of all our sin. In Him and in Him alone, we have God's pledge of full and free forgiveness!

God has canceled your debt of sin, no matter how bad, how many, or how shameful. God is at peace with you. Come to Jesus and pour out your heart to Him in repentance. Trust in Jesus. Your faith, God's gift His Spirit works in you by His promises in the Gospel, has saved you. You are free sin and all its consequences, guilt, curse, and judgment. God is your loving heavenly Father. He has given you the gift of eternal life, and nothing can separate you from His love. With His forgiveness in your heart, live every day in His peace, gladly obeying His commands. Peace is yours! Not the Proud Pharisee, nor the Public Sinner, but the Penitent Sinner receives pardon from the Prince of Peace. And we are that Penitent, Pardoned sinner, aren't we? Won't we also love much? How will you show your love to the Prince of Peace?