

## Forgiven

16 6 13

Almighty God,  
you have broken the tyranny of sin  
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts  
whereby we call you Father:  
give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,  
that we and all creation may be brought  
to the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Our text may be found in today's gospel – Luke chapter 7 and verse 48:

**'Your sins are forgiven.'**

The first three Sundays in June, the first three Sundays after Trinity Sunday, have taken us back to the seventh chapter of Luke's gospel. On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, we read of the healing, at a distance, of the unnamed Centurion's servant as the boy lay close to death. Last week, we heard of Jesus restoring the unnamed widow of Nain's son to life as the young man was being carried out of the town on a bier to be buried. Today, at the end of the chapter, we now turn our attention to the house of Simon the Pharisee where Jesus is an invited guest at meal and where his feet are washed by the tears of an unnamed prostitute.

I'm sure you are familiar with Luke's account of the incident. Jesus of Nazareth would be an interesting guest for a Pharisee like Simon to invite to supper,

curious, I imagine, to hear first-hand in the comfort of his own home what this miracle-working teacher had to say for himself. Reclining, barefoot, at table, the soles of his feet upturned, what happens to Jesus is by any standard quite out of the ordinary.

The meal is in full swing and there would be guests around the table sharing the food and drink that the servants have brought out from the kitchen where it had been prepared perhaps by Simon's wife and mother. At that time of day, with the number of guests present and the servants busy looking after their needs, it must have been possible for the woman to slip unnoticed into the company without being stopped. But what she did next was noticed, not only by Jesus – who may or may not have been uncomfortable or embarrassed by what she did – but by Simon who was clearly scandalised ! Kneeling behind Jesus, weeping copious tears, her tears fall on Jesus' feet. Then, with her hair, she dries them. Then, kissing his feet, she anoints them with a perfumed ointment. How extraordinary ! How very odd !

According to Luke, Jesus is moved to tell his host the parable of 'The Two Debtors' in which two men owe sums of money that they can never repay, one ten times larger than the other. With no chance of ever receiving what he's owed, the lender cancels both debts. Jesus then asks Simon the question which of the two debtors will feel the more grateful. On reflection, Simon rightly identifies the one who has more to be grateful for.

The woman is a prostitute. She knows she's done wrong and she recognises the extent of her wrong-doing. She is moved to tears by her sense of her sinfulness and expresses her sorrow and regret by taking the trouble to wipe Jesus' feet that she has just washed with her tears and then anointing his feet with a perfumed foot balm. Her extravagant gesture is a mark of respect for Jesus and regret for what she has done wrong.

Simon is a Pharisee and as such careful as far as possible to keep the Torah, the Jewish Law – all 613 commandments. He is confident of his own righteousness in the sight of God. Simon thinks he's doing his best to be a good Jew and he does not feel he's got much for which to say sorry. But Simon has not really treated Jesus with the respect a guest might expect of his host at that time and in that place.

What the Centurion, the widow of Nain's dead son and this woman all have in common is that they are all beyond the pale! The centurion is a foreigner, a Gentile, a non-Jew so Jesus strictly should not enter his house. The widow's son is dead and as such his body would have rendered anyone ritually unclean who chanced to touch even the bier the corpse was carried on. The prostitute is unclean because her life-style is immoral.

What Luke chapter seven is teaching us is that people who are outsiders – the sinful, the ritually unclean, the foreigner – all can be healed by God. For the prostitute, the healing comes through the absolution of her sins. She is forgiven because she is truly sorry for what she has done wrong. Her behaviour is

evidence of her change of heart and her desire to be better. And her reward – to hear the healing, life-affirming words of Jesus which are our text today: **'Your sins are forgiven.'**

What is truly encouraging about the passage and the chapter is that all of us, no matter who, no matter what were our past wrong-doings, all of us can be healed and forgiven by God through Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord.

And the challenge to us is twofold:

'Do we honestly think we need to be forgiven ?'

and

'What are we prepared to do to show we're sorry ?'

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

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G: Sermons 28 : Forgiven

