

WELCOME TO...

The Presbyterian Church of
Saint David



June 12th, 2016

Prelude

Call to Worship: *Come with what you have. For you who grieve this day know that you are invited to bring the broken pieces of your heart. **Loved by one another, we discover God's love for us.** Come with what you have. For you, weighed down by too many 'shoulds' and 'what-ifs', know that here you may lay down the burdens of guilt and shame. **Loved by one another, we discover God's love for us.***

Hymn: What wondrous love (1-2) 242

Opening Prayer: *Our hearts are blessed as we gather before you today, O Lord, for you have given us freedom from all our transgressions and joy in exchange for heavy hearts. **You are the refuge we seek when we are troubled and the courage we need when we venture into our days.** Bless us today with your steadfast love as we declare our trust in you. Amen.*

Hymn: What wondrous love (3) 242

Confession: *Can you not see? **No, God, we confess that often we are often blind to what you are doing.** So often we are not looking, and sometimes we choose not to see. **We are comfortable with the way things are.***

Sung: Kyrie Eleison 544

*Sometimes we see, but our hearts are hardened and we look away, making excuses. **But you call us to respond, to live into your way now.** Forgive our status-quo caution, our focus on self-preservation rather than on your truth. **Forgive our narrow vision and insistence that you fit into our plans.** Open us to the movement of your Spirit who offers us life, and give us hearts ready to be generous in response, especially to those in deepest need.*

Hymn: God forgave my sin (1) 774

Luke 7:36ff. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him--that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When

they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "**Do you see this woman?**"

What's going on here? The clues are few. But, I think what we witness in this text - what Luke wants us to see - is what joy looks like. Pure, unbounded, unbridled joy in the face of mercy and grace. Joy in the Presence of Jesus.

Grace is getting something wonderful that you don't deserve.

Mercy is not getting something terrible that you do deserve.

As a sinner, she didn't deserve, or earn, anything good. And perhaps she even deserved something terrible as a punishment.

But, what did she get? Forgiveness. What didn't she get?

Condemnation. I think she knew that before Jesus even said a word. She came into his Presence, and she just knew. And, then she just couldn't help herself. She couldn't help but weep. She couldn't help but wash and kiss and anoint.

And, that's the point. Because we're *her*, her actions are to be our actions. Coming into Jesus' Presence - whether in church on Sunday morning, or any other time - is meant to bring us to such joy that we can't even help ourselves.

Deeply embedded in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola is the call to practice the awareness of God's grace and love. (see:

<http://spiritualpractice.ca/what/what-2/the-spiritual-exercises-of-st-ignatius/>

We're to remember that love and grace is always flowing from God to us. That awareness, if we let it sink deep into our hearts, should bring us to tears. And joy. And make us break open our alabaster jars and start spreading the anointing around. (Rick Morley)

Hymn: Jesu, Jesu 1,3,4

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While the story focuses on the unnamed woman of the city with her alabaster jar, I'm not sure that the story is really, finally, about her. Indeed, I can't help but wonder if it really is about Simon, the Pharisee and his silent judgment of one whose life journey had been so very different from his own. At least that's where the story seems to be left hanging, it seems to me. For while the woman is sent on her way with saving faith and Jesus' own promised peace? Simon is left with Jesus' words contrasting his experience of faith with that of this woman who was known as a sinner -- and he comes across looking as though his life and faith are lacking in some way. And in fact, they are.

Back to the young man who shared his faith story at baccalaureate the other night. I confess that I could not help myself as I listened to him. For it is so that I found myself cringing not only out of concern for him, but also at his very young theology. Oh, while he expressed deep gratitude at God's saving generosity, he also expressed the certainty that he had found his way to Jesus instead of the other way around. Perhaps it is 'splitting theological hairs,' I do know this, and yet living as I do within a theological tradition which stands firm in God's grace and God's initiative in sharing that grace, still I found myself categorizing the boy in a way which was probably entirely unfair. Or at least not in a way that was helpful. Perhaps not unlike Simon did with his uninvited house guest so long ago. Indeed, I confess that I have had to work hard in these last days to be open to the sense of wonder that this young man clearly has experienced in his walk of faith so far. No doubt, life will teach him that God embraced him first. And in the meantime? Isn't it enough to just give thanks with him?

So if nothing else, wondering about Simon the Pharisee in these last days has given me pause to take a deeper look at myself and the silent judgments I make about others most every day. Oh yes, I am certainly reminded once more that the energy it takes to evaluate others is energy which could well be better spent looking at my own heart and all the reasons I have to be grateful for the forgiveness I also so deeply need and have been so freely given. Perhaps then I, too, would find I had no time left for judgment but only gratitude. Perhaps then, I, too, would discover I have nothing left to lose. Maybe then I would also find myself with my arms waving in the air or weeping at the feet of Jesus. And no doubt my faith journey would be all the richer for it.

- *As you receive this story, who do you think you are most like? Simon the Pharisee or the woman with the alabaster jar? Or do you see yourself in both of them?*

- *Is this story more about Simon the Pharisee or the unnamed woman with the alabaster jar? What makes you say so?*
- *What would it look like for you if you had 'nothing left to lose?' What might that mean?*
- *In the story Jesus names Simon while the narrator simply calls him 'the Pharisee'... what does that say to you about Jesus' recognition of who we are?*

- **Invitation:** *This table is God's offer of grace and an invitation to community. Where forgiveness is found and we are called to be the body of Christ, affirmed in our shared mission, and empowered for discipleship. Christ sees when others are blind. Christ offers peace when others offer condemnation. God does not leave us in our brokenness, sin and sorrow but invites us to the table of healing and wholeness. All are invited and all are welcome. Come, for the meal is ready!*

- Hymn: Broken for me (1-2)

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- Prayer of Thanksgiving: *God is with us. Here in this place; at this time of sacred refreshment and renewal. Called in grace and gifted in love.* (we continue in prayer) *Come to us, Spirit of our Lord grace and forgiveness, and let the bread and wine before us nourish and sustain us for the life you offer us and unite us in one body of peace. Nourish us with your brokenness, Renew us with your poured out life, Empower us with your powerlessness, that we may take root in your risen life and bear fruit in your world. You are our life; You are our hope; You are our peace; And we praise you.*

- Hymn: Broken for me (3-4)

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- **Communion**

- **Prayer following communion** *Loving and compassionate God you give us all we need in an abundance and nourish us mind, body and spirit. Send us now into the world to proclaim your love, forgiveness and compassion to all.*

- Hymn: Now let us from this table rise (1, 3-4)

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- *Postlude*

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