

"It's All About Sin and Forgiveness"
1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a

June 12, 2015
Galatians 2:15-21

New Horizons
Luke 7:36-83

We Presbyterians avoid talking about sin. We prefer to name misunderstanding, poor judgment, stress and over-extension as reasons for lapses in behavior or mistreatment of our neighbor. Oh, we do acknowledge that sin happens, but rarely do we accept responsibility for it; choosing to continue to live confidently in our knowledge and experience of God's grace, faith in God's constant love.

Paul was not quite so matter of fact about it all. Paul was schooled in Torah and the Law from birth. His whole life focus had been on fulfilling the Law to the best of his ability. That single-mindedness had lifted him up in the ranks of the Pharisees. His encounter with the risen Christ shattered his life goal of perfect obedience to the Law.

Paul had to give up **all** his old habits of judgment; his sense of superiority over others. He began to see with new eyes- literally. Suddenly his world view was changed. He was able to see potential in others as he reached out to Gentile communities. He grasped a vision of a new community centered on sharing the love and grace of God made known in Jesus Christ. Paul learned very personally that there is no redemptive authority in the Law as commentator Charles Cousar puts it. It is all about relationship with God, with Jesus Christ.

Jesus was trying to help Simon, the Pharisee, see what he had just experienced in his very own household. Simon had failed in keeping the Law of hospitality as he greeted his guests at this dinner party. (Times have changed and none of us greet people we entertain by washing their hands and feet before we share a meal.) But that was the custom and culture of that time and place

An uninvited guest appeared - a woman of the street. Simon was offended by her presence and behavior, but he did not banish her. He watched to see what Jesus would do; all the time judging Jesus' acceptance of the woman and her ministries to him.

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, so he told the parable. Simon was no dummy. He quickly understood the degrees of forgiveness suggested. He gave the "right" answer. [We can guess that the woman knew what she was doing also as she searched out Jesus and entered that party. She must have heard at least one story or observed a healing and recognized Jesus power. She came in thanksgiving, seeking a blessing.]

Jesus checked Simon's comprehension. Did he really get it? Then he compared Simon's hospitality to that of the woman, recognizing the love she had shown him. Jesus then forgave the woman and gave her a blessing to carry into the future.

The other guests murmured --- that means they fussed and complained and made judgments about Jesus' behavior. Jesus paid no mind to them, and moved on from that community. The writer of this Gospel adds a footnote about the women who joined the twelve in accompanying him and the disciples and providing for their needs as they continued their proclamation of the gospel.

This parable calls us to a little self-examination. Like Simon and the Pharisees we aim to do good, to keep the commandments. When we look closely we realize our evaluation is more in terms of our good works - the things that permit us to feel good about ourselves - than in our faithfulness to Jesus' teachings. We have difficulty forgiving ourselves; so forgiveness of others is nearly impossible.

We are called to choose life in Christ above all. We are called to love our neighbor in spite of the things done that annoy us. We are called to live as forgiven children of God, reaching beyond our own safety and self-preservation to address the need of our community and world; and to know the joy of living as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

May we allow our creative instincts to inform our thoughts and behavior and commit to walk with Christ into the future to which God is calling us. Amen