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Pentecost 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“The Cancellor of Debts”  
Text: Luke 7:36-50

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Simon the Pharisee is the kid who, after breaking his father’s favorite mug, glues it back together and puts it back into the cupboard! He is the kid who moves the sofa over the grape juice stain in the carpet, hoping that will hide it from his parents. He is the kid who stands before his mother with chocolate smeared all over his face and boldly proclaims, “But no Mom, I didn’t eat that chocolate!” Simon *thinks* he can get away with it.

It is a common misperception; a common fallacy. **I can sin and get away with it.** After all, it happens all the time, doesn’t it? We speed on the highway and don’t get caught. We cheat on our taxes and don’t get audited. We spread rumors about people and they don’t even know we are talking about them behind their backs. We get more change back from the cashier than we should and put it in our pocket anyway, smiling at our good fortune. We lie and don’t get called on it. **I can sin and get away with it.** And even if I don’t get away with it, I can do something about it. I can fix it, or make up for it, or do better, or pay the fine and make it go away. Because, after all, I don’t do the really bad sins. My sins are, really, the small ones; the harmless ones; the ones everybody does. Right? I’m not a murderer, or an adulterer, or a thief, or a prostitute, or a corporate executive who has bilked the investors in his company out of millions of dollars! Thank God *I’m* not like that! Like . . . that woman . . . !

That woman. She’s a sinner! And *everyone* knows it. She’s the kid who can’t do anything right. You know, the one who’s always in trouble. The one always sent to the principal’s office. She can’t get away with anything, and so her parents and her teachers and all those around her are always telling her she won’t amount to anything. Nobody wants to be with her, to be associated with her! She’s one of those people who show up on the “Cops” TV show! What a loser!

And so imagine Simon’s surprise when such a loser shows up at his dinner party! His *respectable* dinner party, for *respectable* people, having a *respectable* conversation. But then imagine his even greater surprise when Jesus compares Simon to this woman, and

Simon is the one found wanting! **She** is held up as an example for **him** to follow! This is, to be sure, quite scandalous! . . . Oh Jesus, you've done it now! Its one thing to go around forgiving sinners, but don't lump me together with them! There's forgiveness, and then there is FORGIVENESS! You've got to keep things straight. You've got to keep the distinctions. You've got to give credit where credit is due – not lump us all together in one big sinful stew! Or worse yet, go around making sinful women examples for us!

This is a powerful example of sin being put forth by Jesus here. Not the *woman's* sin, but *Simon's* sin! Simon's self-righteousness, which does not allow him to have any room for a Saviour. Any room for forgiveness. Any room for love.

Simon invited Jesus over this day because he was interested in Him. He'd heard a lot about Jesus and wanted to find out for himself if Jesus really was a prophet. And so Simon sees in Jesus not a Saviour, but a peer; an equal; someone to get into a good theological jousting match with! He'll show Jesus how much he knows, how learned he is, and that he is worthy of Jesus' presence at his table. . . . But when this woman arrives, things take a turn. Simon is quick to judge – not the woman, for he already *knows she* is a sinner. He quickly judges Jesus. *Obviously* He is no prophet! If He was, He would know who was touching Him! He would know what kind of woman she is! This Jesus doesn't even know as much as me, Simon thinks! And Simon's self-righteousness grows even greater.

Sometimes we do this too. Judging God. When things aren't going as we planned, we judge that God isn't doing things right. When we don't like His Word, we judge that it doesn't apply to us, or is out of date. When we don't get our due, or our credit, we judge that God isn't holding up His end of the bargain. When we disregard His Word, we judge that we know better; or that science knows better; or that what the world is saying seems to make more sense. Yes, we do it too. There is a little Simon the Pharisee in each of us.

But contrary to what Simon thinks, Jesus does know who this woman is, and what kind of woman she is, **and far worse for Simon**, Jesus knows who Simon is, and what kind of man he is! And so He springs His trap shut on Simon. He asks Simon a very simple question – a question which is clearly below Simon's level of learning and theological acumen! Which will love more, Simon? And Simon, in a condescending way, with a little smirk on his face, looking at all his other invited guests, with a little sarcasm in his voice, answers, ***"I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the larger debt."*** He'll play along with Jesus. . . . But now Jesus springs the trap – just like Nathan the prophet did with King David. ***"Simon, you have [finally] judged rightly."*** All along Simon has been judging *wrongly* – judging the woman wrongly, judging Jesus wrongly, judging himself

wrongly. Now he has spoken the truth. He has condemned himself. His lack of love has revealed his lack of repentance and forgiveness.

And so this woman is an example for Simon, and for us. For why did she come? Why was she so bold as to crash the respectable dinner party this Pharisee was giving? Why did she take such a chance? We heard it was simply because she ***“learned that Jesus was reclining at the Pharisee’s house that day.”*** She came to see her God. Her God who came down to her in the person of this man, Jesus of Nazareth. She doesn’t care what Simon, or anyone else, thinks of her. She knows what Christ thinks of her, esteeming her high enough to come and die for, and that by means of the most shameful and excruciating death known to man. She doesn’t try to defend herself, she’s done with that. There is no self-righteousness or worth in her. She is empty of pride and worry. Her heart is open. She is free. She has heard the Shepherd’s Voice. She has found perfect joy and liberty in His forgiveness. Her debt, *so large*, has been cancelled by Him! His voice called her from her bondage to sin. It has found her and restored her, cleansed her and purified her. In Jesus’ eyes, she is blameless and clean. Her sins are gone, **and as a result**, she cannot contain her love. Her love did not earn her forgiveness; no, His forgiveness gave her the ability to love.

Simon, are you watching? Are we? Here is the proper relationship between us and God. The trap of God’s Law has sprung shut on us. ***You are the man! I am the man.*** This woman realized it. Do we? We are not here as if we have anything to offer God; any service; anything of worth. We are worthless. He does not need us. No, we are here because we need Him. We are the guilty who need forgiveness. The weak who need strength. The low who need lifting up. The dirty who need cleansing. The broken who need to be restored. The poisoned who need to be rescued. The lost who need to be found. The dead who need to be raised.

And to do those very things is why Jesus is here. As the sinful woman knew, it is why He has come. And so **stop** the pretensions, **stop** trying to justify your actions, **stop** trying to come before God with some merit of your own, **stop** trying to get away with your sin. **Stop it!** Instead, repent. Throw yourself on His mercy, for His mercy endures forever. He is the canceller of debts. He is here to seek and to save. And He wants you. He wants to forgive the most horrible and notorious of sinners. To heal and forgive by the power of His cross, dying for you that you might live with Him. To raise you, with Himself, to a new life. Free from sin, and alive in Him. To wash you clean. To feed you with His own body and blood. To welcome you who are scorned and rejected by the world, and give you a place at His Table.

And most of all, He is here to give you His Name. He doesn’t just accept you, or tolerate

you, or put up with you. He doesn't say, "*You can come into my kingdom, but you gotta go stay over there in the corner!*" No! He has come to take you as His own. As His bride. To make you one with Him. And so we come, filled with sin, and He takes us. Not letting us get away with our sin, but dying for our sin in our place. And He gives us His Name. We get that wonderful name change after He takes us as His bride, from sinner to saint. And He gives us the keys to His Kingdom. Everything He has He gives to you. It is all yours. He can do nothing less. Your debt is cancelled. Your sin forgiven. His love is yours.

The sinful woman knew it. No one wanted her around – but Jesus did. Not because He didn't know about her sin, but because He did. . . . So what about you? How large is your debt? Are you still trying to glue yourself back together? Or hide the stains on your heart? Or deny the sin that is all over you? Why? Jesus is here for you, not because He doesn't know about your sin, but because He does. And as He said to the sinful woman, so He says to you, "***Your debt has been cancelled; go in peace.***"

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.