

17 June 2007  
Pentecost 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Learning Forgiveness”

Text: Luke 7:36-8:3 (2 Sam 11-12; Gal 2-3)

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

Learning about forgiveness is never easy.  
If you think it is, you haven't learned it yet.  
Not fully, at least.  
Not like the sinful woman who crashed Simon's dinner party, at least.

Because to learn about forgiveness, you must first learn how deep your sin.  
How deep, deep. All the way down deep. Hopeless deep. Sinful woman deep.  
To confess not only that you have made some mistakes in your life, for we all make mistakes, after all.  
No, that's not it, you Simons. That's too easy.  
We haven't made mistakes, we've rebelled.  
We haven't merely tripped up, we've committed treason.  
And Nathan is here today to say to you, “*You are the man!*”  
Yes, you, are the man.

Oh, I know: big sins and little sins; big sinners and little sinners, right?  
We have to make a distinction . . .  
. . . between the murderer and the gambler; between the liar and the thief; between the gossip and the adulterer.  
*Does that make you feel better?*  
Comparing yourself with others?  
Isn't that what Simon did? It's easy to come out on top that way. There's always *someone* worse than you!  
But does it really make a difference whether you destroy someone's marriage by words or by deeds?

Does it really make a difference whether you talk someone out of their possessions  
or take them by force?

Or is stabbing with our words any less painful than stabbing with a knife?

*Are not the results the same? Are you really any better?*

And those are just sins against our neighbor – what about our sins against God?

Who not only sees our deeds and hears our words, but knows our innermost  
thoughts and desires? Our selfishness, our lack of love, our evil wishes and plans,  
whether we carry them out or not.

And remember these words? *Whatever you've done to one of the least of these, you've done  
it unto me?* (Mt 25:40, 45)

Jesus once compared the Pharisees to “whitewashed tombs.” (Mt 23:27) All nice and  
clean on the outside; all filthy and corrupt on the inside.

*How about you?*

Capital One may ask on TV: *What's in your wallet?*

Today, ask yourself: **What's in your heart?**

*You are the man. Aren't you?*

And that is why you are here this day.

Because we don't just need help, or strength, or advice, or coaching about how to  
live.

We know *how to live!* So did David and the sinful woman.

The problem is: we don't.

And no amount of instruction can change that. In fact, the more we learn, more we  
see and feel our sin.

And know we need more.

Not improvement, but forgiveness.

Improvement is (in paraphrase Paul in the Epistle today), gluing back together the  
mug that I broke. It still isn't much good, is it?

But forgiveness is being given a new mug. Perfect. Whole. As if it had never been  
broken in the first place.

Not simply a restoration, but a new creation.

And so with what joy did David hear those words: *The Lord has put away your sin.*

After he had done so much and dug himself into such a deep hole!

After trying so hard to hide his sin! How broken he was . . .

To hear those freeing, life-giving words!

And how wonderful did those words sound to the sinful woman at Jesus' feet?

*Your sins are forgiven!*

After all she had done in her life! After being used and played and judged so much!

So much shame and contempt! How broken she was . . .

Her joy overflowed and came out her eyes in tears.

How wonderful those words spoken today to you!

*I forgive you all your sins.*

Not my words, but His. *By His authority.*

All the blackness, all the filth, all the hidden sins, all the shame.

Big or little?

Doesn't matter!

*Your sin has been put away!*

But . . . (there's always a "but," isn't there!)

But, *where* has it been put away?

That's important, because if you're like me, there's lots of things you "put away" and forget about for a long time, only to find them again one day!

So too our sin?

No!

No, because while your sin says: *You are the man* . . .

. . . your Saviour says: No – *I am the man.*

*I am the man*, because I came down from Heaven and became the man.

*I am the man*, because I take your sin off of you and put it on myself.

*I am the man*, because I came to be broken and die in your place.

To take the curse of sin for you on the cross.

To die for you, that you rise with Me.

And joined to Christ in Holy Baptism, that's exactly what happens!

His death and resurrection becomes our death and resurrection, and His life our life.

A *new* life.

Not the old life improved! But a new life.

Set free from sin and death and the devil.

Set free to live! Set free to love.

*Thy Strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, we just sang.* (LSB #578 v. 3)

And what God speaks is so.  
At creation, at the font, and even now.  
Same Word, same power, same life.  
Given to David, given to the sinful woman, given to you.  
That the unrighteous be righteous.  
The unholy be holy.  
The broken be made whole.  
And not just once! But always.  
No matter who you are. No matter what you have done.  
*His Strong Word* is stronger than all.

And so while we may never be invited to the dinner parties of today's high and rich and powerful, that's okay – for you have been invited to another feast.

An even greater feast.  
Where you don't have to sneak in. You have the seat of honor.  
And you're not the one washing the feet, it is your feet that are being washed!  
By your host. Your Saviour. Serving you.  
Not with water, but with the blood that flowed from Him.  
And with tears in *His* eyes, so happy is He that you are here!  
To eat His body and drink His blood.  
To receive His forgiveness and be given His life.  
*A great reversal this is, is it not?*  
So great the love of God – to lower Himself, and raise us.  
Us sinners.  
Us Davids.  
Us sinful women.  
Us Simons.  
He is here **for you**, that we be sinful no more.  
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.