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Pentecost 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The Joy of Forgiveness”

Text: Luke 7:36-8:3 (2 Samuel 11-12; Galatians 2-3)

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

*Now when the Pharisee who had invited [Jesus] saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him . . .*

*Simon knew. He thought he knew.*

So very well, Simon, tell me about this woman. What kind of woman is she? What has she done? How do you see her?

*. . . she is a sinner.”*

And by that he doesn't mean a run-of-the-mill-sinner; a sinner like the rest of us sinners. She was a SINNER. All-capital-letters sinner. Not an ordinary one, a BIG one. Notorious. The sins she had were whoppers, and the number of them . . . not just a few. And Jesus is letting a woman *like that* touch Him, and touch Him like that. If He were a prophet, He would have known . . .

Well, Simon **is exactly right**. Jesus doesn't know. He knows none of that - this woman's past, what she has done, how sinful she really is. He *doesn't* know. But not because He is not a prophet, as Simon assumed, but because He is *more* than a prophet. Because He is the Most High God in human flesh. The Most High God who, as Nathan told David, **has put away her sin**. It is washed away, forgiven. It *is* no longer known. This woman, to Jesus, is not a sinner, but His child. She is not a sinner, but a saint.

So you're right, Simon. If He were a prophet, He would know. Indeed. But if He is God, He does not know. Or maybe better to say: He *no longer* knows. He remembers her sins no more.

**Nor yours!** That's the good news for you to take away today. We? We remember our sins. We remember sins we want to forget. Things that are burned into our minds - regrets, mistakes, words we wish we could take back, or words that we wished we had said but didn't, times that we wish we could have a do over. But we can't, and we

remember.

Not so God! One of the amazing things about Him is that while He is omniscient, or all-knowing, knowing everything there is to know, the Scriptures also tell us that *He remembers our sins no more* (Jeremiah 31:34). When they are forgiven, they are forgiven. They are *separated from you as far as the east is from the west* (Psalm 103:12). Which means they cannot get any farther away from you than that. They're gone. And so when Jesus looks at you, He doesn't see a sinner, He doesn't see your sin. He sees one of His children. He sees a saint.

Yet just as we do not see ourselves that way, neither does the world. Neither do all the Simon's out there - people all too eager and ready to point out our sins, remind us of our shortcomings, condemn us for our failures, and marry us to our past. That's who you were and that's who you always will be.

And we do it too. For how often do we look at one another not as children of God, but as sinners . . . and how eager are we to point it out, to use such knowledge to our advantage, to make us feel better about ourselves. Perhaps we should expect that from a self-righteous world, a world that knows nothing of Jesus' righteousness that is given by grace, that is a gift. A world of people who must therefore justify themselves. But we should know better. When we act that way, we are not being who we are. We're not thinking, speaking, or acting as the children of God we are, as the forgiven sinners we are, as the saints we are. Who you were is not what you always will be. Who you now are in Christ, is.

So we need to change our thinking. Change how we look at ourselves and others. Repent of our "Simonality" and instead see with the eyes of Christ and believe His Word. His Word poured over you in Holy Baptism, which says you are not who you once were, but are now a child of God. His Word proclaimed to you in the Absolution, which says that your sins really are forgiven; they have been put away - even the really big ones like this woman's. And His Word lavished upon you in the Gospel, which points you to the One who, as St. Paul said, became cursed for you and for all the world. Cursed with your sin, your condemnation, your death. So that as Paul told the Galatians, ***in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to [you], so that [you] might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*** And you have.

Satan would have you think otherwise, that your sins are too big, too many; that there is something you must do. Do not listen to him. His words are empty and untrue. Jesus' words are not only truth but do what they say. Jesus' words create. They are reality.

For look at this woman, Simon! Look at what she is doing. You say she is a sinner, but what is *she* doing? While you are judging her and judging Me, she is loving - overflowing with thankfulness for the gift Jesus brings. The gift of forgiveness,

acceptance, and a new life. Simon wasn't interested in that gift; didn't think he needed it. But she was, her debt so great. And she wasn't earning her forgiveness, as so many misunderstand this story to teach - **she was loving Jesus for it**, as Jesus' little parable makes clear. She was weeping tears not of sorrow, but of joy. Wiping the feet that had come here *for her*. And kissing the flesh not of a prophet, but of God, her Saviour. What a remarkable witness she was . . . yet Simon too blind to see.

***Your faith has saved you***, Jesus said to her. Not because her faith was so great, but because it was in the right place. In Jesus.

For Jesus really is more than a prophet, more than a teacher - **He is the promised son of David who would die for David's sin**. We heard part of that story today too, of another great sinner, all-capital-letters SINNER, named David, who took another man's wife to be his own, and then murdered that man when he could cover it up no other way. And he thought he got away with it. And he did in the eyes of the people. They didn't know. To them, he was exactly *the opposite* of the sinful woman - everyone thought David was a fine and outstanding example of a godly life! He was the kind of guy Simon would have approved and thought worthy of his table. Why, David's even opening his house to this poor widow . . . What a good guy!

There are people like that in the world too . . . who look good on the outside, but under that good looking veneer are the most heinous sins. Maybe pastors fall into this category. They're good and holy people, aren't they? Maybe you too.

But whether you are someone the world looks **down** on, a notorious sinner like the woman, or someone the world looks **up** to, whose good-looking outside hides a sin-filled inside, like David - whichever you are, **the Son of David died for you**. For while the son Uriah's wife conceived by David did in fact die, the ultimate fulfillment of God's Word through Nathan happened when the Son of David descended from David **through Mary** died, on the cross. When He died for *all* of us all-capital-letters SINNERS. To put away our sins. That we not die, but live. That we be no longer sinners, but His children.

And now Jesus has come here to dine with us. He invites us to the banquet of His Body and Blood. And here we stand side-by-side, notorious sinners, Davids, His children, welcomed by Him, fed by Him, forgiven by Him. He has put away your sins - no matter how large your debt - and remembers them no more.

And so now we can do the same. Not looking down on some and up to others, but looking instead at Jesus, the Saviour of *all* sinners. At His feet pierced for them and for you, His hands which embrace them and you, and His head bowed in death for them and for you. And with Jesus filling your eyes, your heart, and your mouth, there is not judgment but joy. And we depart 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.