

Sunday, June 12, 2016

I Kings 21:1-21

Luke 7:36 to 8:3

### Compassionate Sprit

A woman was waiting at an airport one night, with several long hours before her flight. She hunted for a book in the airport shops, bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop. She was engrossed in her book but happened to see, that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be grabbed a cookie or two from the bag in between, which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene. So she munched the cookies and watched the clock, as the gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock. She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by, thinking, "If I wasn't so nice, I would blacken his eye."

With each cookie she took, he took one too, when only one was left, she wondered what he would do. With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half. He offered her half, as he ate the other, she snatched it from him and thought... oooh, brother. This guy has some nerve and he's also rude, why he didn't even show any gratitude!

Finally her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate, refusing to look back at the cookie thief! She boarded the plane, sank in her seat, then she sought her book, which was almost complete. As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise for in front of her eyes was her bag of cookies. She moaned in despair--If mine are here, the others were his, and he tried to share. Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, that she was the rude one, the real cookie thief. I'm the one who needs to be forgiven! I was the one who acted rudely and he did not even say a thing!

Our readings today from I Kings 21 and Luke 7 primarily focus on the actions of two women- Jezebel and an unnamed woman who was known to be sinful. The first woman is named Jezebel and it is because of her deceitful action which led to the eventual death of a neighbouring vineyard owner that we understand sin and evil in different ways. Jezebel sets us Naboth which eventually leads to his stoning and through his death, her husband King Ahab is able to acquire the land. Jezebel's deceit stems from the fact that she wrote letters in Ahab's name in order that Naboth's reputation would be destroyed.

Once Jezebel heard that Naboth was dead she told Ahab to get up and take possession of the vineyard. However at the same time the word of God came to Elijah the prophet for him to go to Naboth's vineyard and tell King Ahab what had happened. When Ahab and Elijah meet Elijah tells him that he will face disaster. Ahab learns of what Jezebel did in order to get the vineyard. It states in vs 25 "There was never a man like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife." When Ahab heard these words he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and went around meekly humbling himself before God. God saw this and brought the disaster to the time of his son as Ahab had truly sought to be forgiven.

What does it mean to be forgiven? In Ahab's situation he was forgiven for the actions of his wife because he had repented of what had occurred. Yet the action she had done was so severe that the punishment would be placed on his son. Even today when one describes an evil woman the name Jezebel is often attached. For she did not repent or see that what she had done was wrong. She only wanted Ahab to stop sulking.

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew you needed to be forgiven of what you had done wrong? Or maybe someone you knew and cared for also needed to be forgiven and did not know what to do. In Ahab's situation he knew that his wife's actions were wrong and so he put on the cloak of humility- by tearing his clothes and wearing sackcloth in a meek and humble manner.

Often when we are seeking forgiveness we just don't know what to do- for if we would wear sackcloth today we would be offered mental health options. So what do we do if we are in need of forgiveness? We look to Jesus and what his dying and resurrection means for us. We look to Christ to be forgiven and to have hope to begin anew. Just like the woman who is not named in Luke 7.

The setting is in the home of one of the Pharisees where Jesus has been invited for dinner. Jesus is sitting at the table and relaxing. Suddenly a woman enters uninvited into this Pharisee's home and stands beside Jesus. She is weeping at his feet and her tears fall on his feet. Her hair is loose and she wipes his feet with her hair, kisses his feet and then pours perfume on them. Just think of all the societal rules this woman had broken—her hair was loose, she went in a room filled with men, she cried and poured expensive perfume on a man's feet in a community leader's home where she had not even been invited into the home at all. And this woman's place in this community was filled with sin. But it is Jesus who when looking at this woman and feeling her devotion and love, that he sees her desire to be forgiven. She is not seeking forgiveness for the societal rules she has broken, but she is seeking forgiveness for all her sins.

In the midst of this woman's actions of tears, perfumes and crying, Jesus has compassion upon her. For he sees in her a desire to be saved. A desire to be reconciled and to have peace. Jesus tells Simon a story and with this story those present in the Pharisee's home realize that Jesus is teaching about the real meaning of forgiveness of sins. Jesus' story of two men who owed money to a moneylender resonates with those present in that home as well as each of us. Two people owed money 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii. Neither could repay the debt and so the moneylender canceled the debts of both. Which person would love him more? The one who had the bigger debt.

This woman was known to live a sinful life. Yet she boldly goes to where she has learned that Jesus was at the Pharisee's house for dinner. She walks right in and seeks forgiveness through her actions of washing his feet with her tears, wiping them dry with her hair, and has been kissing his feet. She poured perfume on his feet and she showed him love. Jesus in his compassionate spirit then says to this woman, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved

you; go in peace.” Can you imagine the talk at the coffee shop the next morning? This woman who is not named—is forgiven by Jesus, who gave him that authority and he did this in a Pharisee’s house?! What next? He’s going to do something more? How dare he say that she is forgiven!

Yet this woman’s life was forever changed. She learned of Jesus’ gift and wanted to be forgiven. She wanted to be able to live in peace and to build upon her re-found faith in God.

What about you? Where is your faith in relationship with the compassionate Spirit of God? We all sin and fall short of perfection; we sin against God, each other and those whom we love. Yet the Spirit of God calls us to come to Christ and be forgiven.

Our statements of faith invite us to remember that we believe “in the forgiveness of sins.” And that we believe in God who came in Jesus to reconcile and make new. To reconcile to bring harmony to what was once before. To bring inner peace—because of Jesus.

The unnamed woman believed that Jesus would enable her to begin her life anew as she was now forgiven. She had made peace within through Christ’s forgiveness and through her faith in God. But do we seek forgiveness for the right reason? Do we look to Jesus and yearn for his compassionate Spirit to envelop us and guide us as we look to the future? Or are we merely eating the cookies that are there and not realizing that what we are doing is cheating ourselves of the potential to live with peace within?

Jesus was relaxing at a Pharisee’s house when this woman walked in and showed her love by washing his feet. How do you show your love to Christ Jesus? Do you come to him in prayer and seek answers to questions or do you merely look to Jesus –up there and ask to be forgiven; and then you wait a few minutes? Or are you coming to Christ and seeking his compassionate Spirit saying to yourself, I believe in the forgiveness of sins through Christ Jesus, my Saviour. And are you humbling yourself not with sackcloth, but with tears of wonder and joy because of the gift and hope of reconciliation with God? This is what Christ saw in this woman and can see in you.

God’s Spirit is filled with compassion but are we looking for His love to forgive us. Are we truly seeking forgiveness so that we might look beyond ourselves and feel God’s grace?

C.S. Lewis writes, “Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it.”

God’s compassionate Spirit, calls to each one of us – come, tell me what you have done, I’m listening. Feel my love. You are forgiven.

LET US PRAY: God of grace and love may your Spirit move amongst us all at this time; where there are hearts in pain, needing to talk of peace and reconciliation, open our hearts to speak to you and then when we are able to speak to others whom you have called us to love. Here us O God as we seek you and experience your compassion. We share in prayer... SILENCE. Come touch our hearts O Spirit so that we may know compassion. Amen.