

4th Sunday After Pentecost
June 12, 2016
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Lately we've been hearing stories of Jesus healing people; today we heard about people healed of blindness.

- In our first lesson we heard about King David who was blinded by lust, power and pride and thought he could do whatever he wanted to please himself.
- In our Gospel reading we heard about Simon who was blinded by his self-righteousness and judgments. Both were healed but in radically different ways.
- David encountered the justice of God.
- Simon encountered the grace of God.

We and our world need both God's justice and God's grace; each can and do bring healing. Our reading today is just the end of David's long, sordid story - it is like something out of the tabloids.

- David saw a woman named Bathsheba, a woman who was married to his neighbor, Uriah.
- David was blinded by lust.
- He wanted Bathsheba so took her into his house, had his way with her, and got her pregnant.
- Then to hide what he had done, David arranged for Uriah to be killed.

This kind of unjust action should be punished, but David was king and he wouldn't acknowledge the evil of his ways. So God sent the prophet Nathan to speak to David. This was the part of his story that we heard today. Nathan told David a parable about a rich man who had many flocks and herds but still stole a lamb from a poor man to feed it to his guest.

- David became angry and demanded that the rich man be punished.
- Nathan responded, "you are the man".
- He told David you've been given so much but still you took a woman who was not your wife and had her husband killed.
- Now there will be consequences - the death and destruction you have set loose by your actions will also affect your own house.

Nathan's parable opened David's eyes. He was convicted and said, "I have sinned against the Lord." With his confession, David was forgiven. Nathan told him he would not die, yet still his son would die.

That is really troubling - there's no way around it. It's really difficult to hear that God struck David's son and made him very ill. This seems radically different than the God we see in Jesus who tells us to turn the other cheek and avoid using the sword. Yet there's a way in which it's good to know that God cares about justice and that God is willing to get involved to bring about justice. As we hear so much about unjust rulers in Syria, North Korea, Russia and elsewhere, as we hear about rapists on college campuses who get very light punishments, it's good to know that God doesn't just turn a blind eye to the injustice in our world. It's good to know that God doesn't just stay up in heaven watching from afar saying, "it's too bad they're acting that way." We see a God who cares deeply about how we live with one another, a God who gets involved in it all.

Throughout the Old Testament God is constantly described as gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But, we also see that God is troubled, grieved, hurt, angry and upset by our unjust actions and that God is actively working to bring about justice. God's law, God's justice are needed in our world. God's law can convict us of our own blindness to justice, to our own failings, to the needs of others. When that happens, when God's law causes us to repent and turn to God for healing, forgiveness and help in living more justly, that is a good thing. In Jesus we see that God has committed to work in our world by way of mercy and forgiveness, rather than punishment, but God still does care about justice and we should as well.

Problems arise when a focus on justice blinds us to God's love and mercy, when a concern for justice keeps us separated from God and one another. Problems arise when we become focused on judging others instead of showing love and mercy ourselves. That's what was happening in the Gospel reading for today. There was a woman who was known as a sinner, who was labeled as outside of God and God's ways. If the woman had focused on God's justice she would have stayed away, trapped in her own brokenness and pain. This is where so many of us can get stuck. When we think about God's justice we feel unworthy and afraid. Yet this woman saw in Jesus the forgiveness and mercy of God and so she risked approaching him. When he didn't rebuff her, she went on to show Jesus great love and care. She washed his feet with her tears, kissed his feet, and anointed his feet with oil.

Simon the Pharisee watched all of this and could not see the love and beauty in what this woman was doing. He was blinded by his self-righteousness and by his own judgments: "this woman is a sinner", "Jesus is not a true prophet or he wouldn't let her touch him." Simon could only see the externals and labels; he could not see the love and faith this woman demonstrated. Simon got stuck in the self-righteousness that trips us up so often today as we label and judge those who act and think and believe in ways that seem wrong to us, in ways that make us uncomfortable. Jesus confronted Simon with the grace of God telling him a parable about a creditor who forgave debts. Then he said to Simon, "do you see this woman? Look Simon at what happens when people encounter the grace, the mercy, the love of God. Lives are transformed, love is poured out, healing happens. Open your eyes and see."

God cares about justice but, it seems, God is even more concerned about transformation. God doesn't just respond to what we do wrong, God works to transform us into people who see that we are loved and then can show great love to others. Today, Jesus meets us here to transform us. Today we meet Jesus in the living word and in the meal of his love, and we encounter the mercy of God. We encounter God who heals us of our blindness, who helps us to see ourselves and others as God sees us - as sinful and judgmental, yes, but also loved and loving.

Today Jesus sees you for who you are - broken and beloved.

Today Jesus comes to assure you that you are forgiven.

Today Jesus meets us to anoint us with love so that we might go out and wash feet and serve others and share the transformative mercy of God with a world so in need of healing.

Let's take a moment to respond to that love with our prayers.

Amen.

Our Hymn of the Day is printed on the back of the announcements handout.