

Sermon 2010 Pentecost 3
Text: Luke 7:47
Theme: "We Love Jesus Best!"
6-13-10

Were any of you a little embarrassed by the sign out front this week? If you didn't look at it, it boldly proclaims: "We Love Jesus Best!" You think the residents of Villa Park are wondering about us? That's okay. I'm your pastor. They've been wondering about you for almost 6 years!

Ask anyone and you are likely to hear that God loves a person who tries really hard to live a good life and if you give it a good try, God will take care of the rest. That is human logic. It makes sense to us. If God looks down and sees you really trying, he will take care of any shortcomings. We say it to kids all the time. Just try your best and that will be okay. But it's not okay when it comes to salvation is it? According to the Bible, if you try your best and you still are not perfect...you go to hell. Not okay. Not in my book.

Pelagius was a theologian from about three hundred years after Jesus rose from the dead. He denied original sin and declared that human beings could do good works of their own accord and if in fact they did, God, who is loving and kind, would see to it that they made it

into heaven. Nice idea, but he was banished for heresy because that idea is utterly condemned in Scripture.

Many variations of Pelagianism have followed and the most popular is the idea that we are too sinful to do much so all we have to do is want to do good and that is enough. That shows up all over the place. The Lord knows I tried and he will accept that effort and save me. But as soon as a human being does ANYTHING for his own salvation then salvation is totally up to him.

We already know that it is God's will for all people to be saved right? 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says, **"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."** So if it is God's will that all people be saved, what more do we have to do? NOTHING. We can only reject God's will and that is certainly possible. Our only potential activity is to undo what God has done and that makes sense. God does. Human beings undo.

So in our Gospel for today, Jesus came to dinner at a Pharisee's house. His host, like most of the Pharisees believed that his salvation was in his own hands. If he lived a righteous, law-abiding life, God would bless him with the resurrection from the dead and eternal life.

But sinful people did not receive such a reward for their reward is in this life only. They have all the fun. Why should they get heaven too?

During dinner, an uninvited guest came up behind Jesus. Remember that Jesus was reclining at the table on his side with his feet folded behind him. Suddenly he felt this woman's tears dripping on his feet. Of course Jesus knew she was there and he knew who she was. She was a very sinful woman; probably a prostitute or at the very least a woman with little concern for the proprieties of the day because she let her hair down and that was scandalous in itself. Now understand that allowing her to wet his feet with her tears, dry them with her hair and anoint them with perfume had implications for Jesus beyond a nice foot rub. A Rabbi who allowed an unclean person to so much as touch him would have become ceremonially unclean and unable to enter the temple.

So Simon, the host, sees all of this and he is aghast! How could this Rabbi allow this horrific sinner to touch him? Jesus does not bother waiting for his questions. Who loves Jesus best; the self righteous person who does not really believe he has any need for him

or the desperate sinner who knows that without Jesus, he has no hope?

There are many self-righteous sinners who believe that they need Jesus for the big stuff but that they have the small stuff handled. Many people think that Jesus is only an example of how to live and if one follows his example, he will be righteous but even if you are a very pious soul, what about the fleeting thoughts? The quick glances? The small insidious sins? Are they not just as damnable? And don't think that good works somehow pay off sin – in fact, even a good work, done for the wrong reason, is a sin itself! If you give money to the church thinking that it will somehow pay off your drunken debauchery Friday night, you have committed an even greater sin by trying to bribe God! A good work is done from faith, for the glory of God not for the payment of debt.

Who loves Jesus best? The crassest, most obvious sinner who knows that his only hope is Jesus. No matter how much he tries, he fails. No matter how much he wants to live a pious, holy life, he fails. That is why we love Jesus best. We have been forgiven so much more than the many who have not asked. As Jesus turned to the sinful

woman and said, “, “Your sins are forgiven....Your faith has saved you; go in peace,” so likewise, he speaks through me today and when you have received the Lord’s Supper, I, who stand in the stead of and by the authority of Jesus Christ will dismiss you with these words, “Now this body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you steadfast in the one true faith into life everlasting. Depart in peace.” Like the sinful woman crying at his feet, we depart his altar knowing that there is nothing we must do. Our sins have been forgiven. It is finished.

Come to the table. Hear again that all sin has been paid. Know that the Word of God and his Sacraments will strengthen your faith and enable you to hold on to his promise of love and grace. We have sinned much, and because we sin much, we love Jesus best. AMEN