

Pentecost 3C 2010
Luke 7:36-8:3
Sermon for Advent LC
June 13th, 2010

“Who Really is Welcome?”

Dear sisters and brothers, grace to you and peace from God the Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who is welcome at God’s table? Who is welcome to receive the grace of Jesus Christ, poured out upon the cross? Who is welcome in the church...and who is not? The easy answer and the one that I think I have heard from your mouths and your minds is everyone is welcome. Everyone is welcome to God’s grace and God’s table- I agree. But, then why do so many feel they are not? Why, if we as the body of Christ at least here in this little church of Advent say and do welcome- do so many people feel they aren’t welcome even around here? I think it is easy sometimes to say that well we welcome everyone...and to a point I think we do, but what does welcome look like? Is it simply saying that we welcome everyone, no matter what- or does there have to be more? Who is welcome- and how do we let them know they are welcome? That question matters because there is a sense by many that they don’t belong for one reason or another. I googled something like “why I don’t like church?” And the results were amazing- I found many blogs and other things related to why people have a problem with church and all it is- and the number one reason was repeatedly something like this, “The church does not practice what it preaches- they say I am welcome but I feel anything but when I am there...I wish someone would show me how welcome I am.” So who is welcome...and who is not?

The reason I ask that question today is this- even though I think we do a heck of a job showing the love of Christ in this place, I know we can do more. Not just for here and not just to grow this worshipping community- but out there- in the world to build the kingdom of God by sharing the love of God through what we do and what we say. Because if God’s grace is so good like we say it is, then we need to be about the business of sharing it...so who is welcome...and what are WE doing TO welcome them? That question has been around as long as there have been humans. We see that question lived out today in the Gospel of Luke- the religious authority casting some out as sinners, and essentially saying they are not welcome. Simon, the Pharisee is a good candidate for us to blame and to cast him out as evil..but really how many of us have not fallen victim to putting walls up that keep some out? So the way that question is answered is critical to how we do ministry in our lives and our world. So again I ask, who is welcome?

Before moving into the Gospel fully today I want to make us all go somewhere a bit uncomfortable. Ready? Think hard about the people you don’t like...about the people who you are so uncomfortable around either because they did something or do something you don’t like, or because of another reason- think about them. Maybe this is pointless because you don’t have anyone like that- if so great, hang on a minute, but for the rest of us this might be a bit painful to think about those people we don’t really like. Now...if you have one of them in mind travel with me to the story in the Gospel. Simon, a Pharisee and well respected person invites Jesus over for a meal. He is eager to learn from this great teacher and is looking forward to a nice meal and opportunity to ask questions and dialogue. Just as the meal is beginning a woman walks in- now she is a sinner- word has it that she is a prostitute who has sinned greatly. She interrupts the meal and rushes to Jesus’ feet and begins to wipe them with her hair and anoint them...kissing them in a great act of adoration and thanksgiving. This drives Simon crazy- not just because his meal has been interrupted but because of who this woman is- to him she is an outsider...she is the person to him that I asked you to focus on- the one you have a hard time being around, the one who you don’t agree with, the one who you would rather just forget about. And there she is...sitting at the feet of the teacher and Jesus lets her. Jesus allows her to do her act and then uses it as an amazing lesson which completely counters how Simon and all the religious leaders think. Who is welcome- Jesus shows by forgiving the sins of this woman that all are welcome, but more than that that all deserve to be loved and shown grace and mercy in a very real way. Who do you welcome and who do you keep out?

That question is probably one we need to continue to ask as a community and as members individually in the body of Christ. And I think the way we begin to counter the world's view of the church that only some are good enough, only some are welcome is to live out a life that is rooted in the same kind of response as the woman forgiven in the Gospel today. What I mean by that is this- I am a sinner, you are a sinner and without the exuberant grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are in very big trouble therefore our response to our Lord fittingly should be praise, thanksgiving, and everything else that seems crazy. This woman, this sinful woman who had lived a life that was so dark realized how much she needed Jesus and nothing stopped her from getting to him- and thanking him- I wonder if sometime we lose sight to the fact that we really need Jesus.... Friends, we need Jesus- friends, Jesus calls us out of our brokenness and loves us where we are and pulls us to a new reality. That new reality is a life that gives witness to the kingdom- who is welcome- all are welcome- won't you join Jesus in making sure all truly feel welcome and not just saying it. God loves you- that is the best news ever- God died for you it is so great to know that- so take it, take the word of hope and live it out so that the world you encounter will see a glimpse of hope and also know they too are welcome to feel the love of this Lord who redeems you and calls you to go.

God loves you and so do I. Amen.