

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
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“To have no illusions about ourselves, to realize who and what we are, and at the same time to know that God accepts us, is to taste the kingdom of God.” (A Time for Good News, Herbert O'Driscoll, p.101)

To these words, written by priest, Herbert O'Driscoll, I would add “To have no illusions about ourselves, to realize who and what we are, and at the same time to know that God accepts us, *to know that God loves us, to know that God forgives us*, is to taste the kingdom of God.”

In today's Gospel from Luke, the woman, the woman who was a sinner, this woman tasted the kingdom of God. This woman, this sinner, had her life so radically transformed by the love, forgiveness and acceptance that Jesus showed her, her life was so transformed that she became a gratitude-filled risk taker. She risked breaking all of the cultural mores, she risked being thrown out into the street, she risked rejection by her bold actions. She came, the tears indicating that she knew that she was a sinner, and yet she came knowing that God, knowing that Jesus would not turn her away. Her life was so transformed by forgiveness that she came in ultimate gratitude, wanting to give back to the one who was the source of her forgiveness. She came, her life overflowing with love.

We are never told about this woman's sins. And although there is plenty of speculation and although we can all use our own imaginations, the truth is we don't need to know what those sins were for the sins are not the important part of this story. The important part of this story is the forgiveness for it is in the transformation that comes from being forgiven, it is in this transformation that we will find God. Her many sins were forgiven, she believed it, she lived it and she came in the deepest of gratitude and bathed and anointed Jesus' feet.

I like this story about the forgiven, transformed woman. I like it because I can identify with her.

Over the course of my life, perhaps this is true for some of you as well, over the course of my life I have sinned. Just like in this story, the details of my particular sins, the details of your particular sins, the details are not important. The power those sins held over me, the power your sins may hold over you, the shame, now that is important. Just like Simon who saw only the woman's sins, I saw in myself only the sins that I had committed. Even when I began to discern God's call to ordained ministry, the vivid knowledge of my sins kept me from responding. I defined myself by my sins and I felt guilty. My guilt held me hostage.

Guilt, as they say, is the gift that keeps on giving. I am certain that there are some here today who know this gift of guilt all too well. Guilt about something that we have done in our lives, guilt about our sins can take on a life of its own and grow and grow and grow. Guilt can hold us hostage. My own guilt kept me from responding to God's call for a number of years. It was only after finally opening myself up to Jesus' loving, healing, forgiving, life-transforming embrace, only after that was I able to risk becoming a gratitude-filled risk taker.

I know that there are many of us who are heavy laden with the knowledge, the remembrance, the guilt of sin. I know as well that Jesus offers us the gift of forgiveness and beyond that I know that if we accept this gift our lives will be forever transformed.

We don't know how the woman in this Gospel came to know this life-transforming forgiveness. It may be that she had had a prior meeting with Jesus. It may be that she had only heard about him but that she believed that he would offer her life, that he would offer her forgiveness and so it was that with great intention and at great risk she came to him. As Jesus said to her, your faith has saved you.

We can do the same. There are many ways for us to learn, deep in our hearts, about Jesus' life-transforming forgiveness. Some will hear about how Jesus forgives and that if they accept that forgiveness in their lives, their lives will be changed. Others will want to talk with a priest and make a confession. Still others will join in small groups to study scripture to learn about forgiveness. And others will start working with young people, or they will help to build a Habitat House, or they will help with a Monday night community dinner, or they will find some other service opportunity. There is no one way to learn about God's forgiveness.

But once you learn it, deep in your hearts, there are no limits to the love that you will have, love that you have been given to share, love of yourself, love of others, love of God. You may never forget your sins, but that is not important. What is important, and what you will know is that “to have no illusions about ourselves, to realize who and what we are, and at the same time to know that God accepts us, *to know that God loves us, to know that God forgives us*, is to taste the kingdom of God.

If forgiveness is only an academic concept for you, if it is something that is given to others but not to you, or maybe even if you live believing that you have no need of forgiveness, this Gospel today is an invitation for you to make forgiveness real in your life. It is an invitation to transformation, it is an invitation to taste the kingdom of God.

Come today, tears and all, and like the woman in the city who came to bathe and anoint Jesus out of her overflowing love and gratitude, come and have your lives transformed.