

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 2:15-21, Psalm 5, Luke 7:36-8:21
June 12, 2016
David Teschner

I am almost finished with my book of daily meditations for men by Franciscan priest Richard Rohr that several of us have been reading. Early in the morning, before I wrote this sermon last Thursday, I read this from Day 363: "At the heart of male spirituality is the knowledge that we are imperfect, that we come to God not by doing it right, but ironically and wonderfully by doing it wrong!"

...we come to God not by doing it right, but ironically and wonderfully by doing it wrong!

Isn't that a perfect summary statement for today's gospel from Luke?

A woman, known probably to everyone in the village as a sinner, most likely a prostitute, enters a roomful of respectable men in the house of a virtuous Pharisee, and proceeds to make a big display of lavishing her gratitude upon Jesus. I am sure everyone in that room was completely shocked and dumbfounded by her intrusion and presence except Jesus.

He was expected by the host to rebuke her for her most inappropriate display of affection in public by disregarding every speck of proper etiquette. Regular women had their place, as limited as it was back then, but sinful women had no place in that society.

...we come to God not by doing it right, but ironically and wonderfully by doing it wrong!

This story is first and foremost about forgiveness. When Jesus sees that Simon is flustered and disconcerted beyond words, he tells Simon a little parable about forgiving debts. Simon gets its meaning and answers correctly yet reluctantly, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt [loves him more.]"

Then Jesus asks Simon a follow-up rhetorical question: "Simon, do you see this woman?" For me this is perhaps the crux of the story.

Simon might say that, of course, he sees her with his eyes, but he certainly doesn't see her with his heart. To Simon she is irrelevant at best, disposable and a blight on society. Simon might honestly say he has no use for her because the one he understands to be God has no use for her.

I think it is fair to say that nearly all of us think of certain persons or categories of persons much the same way as Simon thinks of this woman. She has lived a portion of her life at least in a most disapproving and degrading manner. And yet she obviously wanted something more or at

least very different, or she wouldn't have had a life-changing encounter with Jesus. He was able to offer her forgiveness and a new start in life when there were no offers or place for it from others in her community.

She would never have loved Jesus so much if, like the Pharisee, she didn't think she needed forgiveness. The more virtuous and morally upright we think we are, the less love and compassion we have for others who we think are less so. We might ask ourselves where we fall on the debt-o-meter to God. Do I owe God 50, 100, 300, or 500 denarii?

It is easy for any person or religion that starts with a merciful understanding of God to slowly over time become all about individual morality. After a while any church full of people who were saved by faith in God's generous forgiveness can start to credit themselves for their good and holy behavior. We can all too easily forget that we continue every day to be forgiven sinners helped by God, the Holy Spirit.

Juanita read recently that Pope Francis said the church should be like a field hospital – its members going out into the world to treat the sick and wayward with the compassion, kindness and mercy of Jesus. It is a pertinent and thoughtful metaphor.

A soldier asked a holy monk if God accepted repentance. The monk replied, "Tell me, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away?"

The soldier answered, "No, I mend it and use it again."

The old monk said to him, "If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about his creatures?"

Aren't we all mended cloaks?

If we are rule-oriented or overly legalistic like the religious Pharisees were in Jesus' day, it will probably be harder for us to forgive. (An extreme and horrific example of this was the recently reported mother in Pakistan who set her own daughter on fire because she eloped with a man that her family didn't pick for her.) Someone has said that "every time God forgives us, God is saying that God's own rules do not matter as much as the relationship God wants to create with us." (Richard Rohr, [Falling Upward](#)) If God can break God's own rules to keep winning us back, can't we ease up on others and ourselves?

Luke, more than any other of the gospel writers, seems to want to place women on more of an equal footing with men. At the end of the passage today, he mentions three more women by name, all of whom are first healed from an infirmity or cured from evil spirits. Like the unnamed woman earlier, they, too, know themselves to be changed forever because of Jesus. We are told that they are travelling in the company of Jesus and the twelve to spread the good news of

God's kingdom. They are doing more than just bankrolling the Jesus movement. They are practically apostles. It is regrettable that later generations of male church leaders relegated the position and place of women to far less important roles for hundreds of years.

In just a moment, I will baptize a little girl, and she will become our newest Christian member. It is up to her family, godparents and all of us to make sure that she knows God's unconditional love, full inclusion, ceaseless mercy, and that access to the highest positions of leadership are her new birthright in Christ Jesus. AMEN.