

**Sunday, July 10th, 2015**

PRELUDE

"Grand Choir Dialogue" - Eugene Gigout

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,*

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 32 and printed in our bulletins?”

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 32)

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

**Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

While I kept silence, your hand was heavy upon me;

**When I acknowledged my sin to you, you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you.

**You are a hiding place for me and you preserve me from trouble;**

You surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

**Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.**

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous!

**Shout for joy, all you upright in heart.**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Gracious God, who has provided for us a bountiful inheritance, help us in this time of worship to be fully aware of your presence and fully responsive to your Word. Help us to find ourselves in the biblical stories we hear. Open our eyes to see ourselves, both as we truly are, and as you would have us to be. Open our hearts that we might love others as you have loved us. Open our hands that we might provide for others' needs as readily as we provide for our own. Grant to us a saving faith, and peace the world cannot give. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”, number 276 in our *Hymnals*.

*The liturgist should step back from the microphone for the hymn.*

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

*The Hymnal #276*

*After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...*

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

God does not delight in wickedness; and he will not abide with evil. But through the abundance of His steadfast love, he will allow us to enter His house and seek his forgiveness. In penitence and faith, let us pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent confession. Let us pray...

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Our Father, forgive our selective blindness that keeps us from a true examination of our lives. We compare ourselves with obvious sinners, and congratulate ourselves on our virtues. We exaggerate our own faithfulness while discounting the kind deeds of others. Deliver us from faith that comforts without confrontation, and cheap grace that affirms but does not challenge. Remind us of the forgiveness that is ours when we admit our mistakes and of the increase of your grace that follows our confession and repentance. Forgive and heal us by your mercy which you are always more willing to give than we are to receive. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION *(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered. We have been made right with God by faith in Christ Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us, and whose death was not in vain. Friends believe the Good News!

**In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!**

\*GLORIA PATRI

*The Hymnal #579*

*Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;*

*As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.*

**\*PASSING OF THE PEACE**

Having been reconciled to the Father through the gift of his son, let us also be reconciled with one another and share His peace. The peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

*Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

*After a few moments, liturgist will step into the lectern and say...*

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Ms. Karen.”

*The liturgist will take a seat.*

**CHILDREN’S SERMON**

*(All Singing)*

**Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;  
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;  
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.**

*As the children leave, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

“Would all who are able, please stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, “Amazing Grace” #280 in our hymnals.”

**\*HYMN OF PREPARATION**

“Amazing Grace”

*The Hymnal #280*

*After the hymn, the liturgist will return to the pulpit and say,*

**THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

**Please be seated.** . . We give our offerings because we owe God more than we can ever repay. We give because we love Jesus and want to show our devotion. We give because there are needs to be met here and in other places where we cannot go. We give because we need to be generous in order to be whole. So let us give gladly and lavishly as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings....

*The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.*

**THE OFFERTORY**

**"Andantino" -Eugene Gigout**

**Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**\*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)**

*Hymnal #592*

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

*After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

**\*OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... Gracious God, we recognize that we cannot truly love you without also loving our neighbor. It is out of gratitude for your amazing grace extended toward us, that we make this offering. It is given freely from the bounty of blessings we have already received, and we pray that you would follow it with your blessing and use it to enlarge the kingdom of Christ. Amen.

**THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**"The Apostle's Creed"**

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Invite the congregation to... “Be seated,” and take a seat.*

**SPECIAL MUSIC**

**"O Divine Redeemer" - Charles Gounod**

**Joanna Smith, soprano**

*After the soloist finishes, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say...*

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from Paul's letter to the Galatians, the second chapter, beginning at the seventeenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1013 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God..."

"But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose."

*The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation.*

*When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the pulpit & say...*

Our Gospel lesson this morning is taken from Luke, the seventh chapter, beginning at the thirty-sixth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #897 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?"

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## THE SERMON

"A Tale of Two Sinners"

Could two people have been more different? While at the same time sharing the common identity of all men and women as sinners. Imagine if this same story had been written by Charles Dickens instead of Dr. Luke. It might sound something like this.

He was the best of men; he was the worst of men. He had been educated from his youth to know the will of God; he had been conditioned by life to ignore that will as it suited him.

She was a woman of the streets; she was a child of God. She was a woman of fallen virtue; she was a woman restored. She had been used and condemned by men for their pleasure; she had been saved by the man, Jesus, for the glory of God.

He is looked up to. She is looked down on. He is a church leader. She is a streetwalker.

He makes a living promoting standards. She's made a living breaking them.

He's hosting the party. She's crashing it.

Ask the other residents of Capernaum to point out the more pious of the two, and they'll pick Simon. Why, after all, he's a student of theology, a man of the cloth. Anyone would pick him.

Anyone, that is, except Jesus. Jesus knew them both. And Jesus would pick the woman. Jesus does pick the woman. And, what's more, he tells Simon why.

Not that Simon wants to know. His mind is elsewhere. How did this whore get in my house? He doesn't know whom to yell at first, the woman or the servant who let her in.

Simon is is simmering just below his boiling point. Just look at her--groveling at Jesus' feet. Kissing them, no less! If Jesus were who he says he is, he would know who she was and have nothing to do with her. But the truth is that Jesus does know who she is. And just as important he knows who Simon is-- besides the wealth that he uses to buy respectability, behind the facade of righteousness he works so hard to maintain, behind the power that hides a mountain of insecurities.

But Jesus does know who and what the woman is. And just as importantly, he knows the true identity of Simon and hears the prideful thoughts of his hate-filled host.

So Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people--five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

The ever logical Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't give me a kiss of greeting, but she has kissed my feet again and again from the time I first came in. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. I tell you, her sins-- and they are many-- have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

Simon invites Jesus to his house but treats him like the red headed child at an Italian family reunion. No courtesy. No greeting. No water or basin to wash the dust of the road from his feet. No oil for his head. Simon does nothing to make Jesus feel welcome.

The woman, however, does everything that Simon didn't. We aren't told her name. Just her reputation-- a woman of questionable virtue with no invitation to the party and no standing in the community.

Worrying about what people would think didn't stop her from coming. But then, she hasn't come for them-- only for him. Her every move is measured and meaningful. Each gesture extravagant. She puts her cheek to his feet, still dusty from the path. She has no water, but she has tears. She has no towel, but she has her hair. She uses both to bathe the feet of Christ. As one translation reads, "she rained tears" on his feet (v. 44 MSG). She opens a vial of perfume, her only possession of worth, and massages it into his skin.

What does this woman have that Simon doesn't? What one discovery has she made that Simon hasn't? What one treasure does she cherish that Simon doesn't? Simple. Grace. We don't know when she received it. We aren't told how she heard about it. But we know this. She came thirsty. Thirsty from guilt. Thirsty from regret. Thirsty from countless nights of making love and finding none. She came thirsty.

And when Jesus hands her the goblet of grace, she drinks. She doesn't just taste or nip. She doesn't wet her lips with a moistened fingertip or take the cup and sip it. She lifts the liquid to her lips and drinks, swallowing like the parched pilgrim she is. She drinks until the mercy flows down her chin and onto her

neck and chest. She drinks until every inch of her soul is moist and soft. She comes thirsty and she drinks deeply.

Simon, on the other hand, doesn't even know he is thirsty. People like Simon think they don't need grace; so they analyze it. They don't request mercy; they debate it.

It wasn't that Simon couldn't be forgiven; he just never asks to be.

So while she drinks up, he puffs up. While she has ample love to give, he has no love to offer. Why? The 7:47 Principle. Read again verse 47 of chapter 7: "A person who is forgiven little shows only little love." We can't give what we've never received. If we've never received grace, how can we love others?

Long to be more loving? Begin by accepting your place as a dearly loved child. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us" (Eph. 5: 1-2 NIV).

Want to learn to forgive? Then consider how you've been forgiven. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32 NIV).

Finding it hard to put others first? Think of the way Christ put you first.

"Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God" (Phil. 2:6 NLT).

Need more patience? Drink from the patience of God (2 Pet. 3:9). Is generosity an elusive virtue? Then consider how generous God has been with you (Rom. 5:8). Having trouble putting up with ungrateful relatives or cranky neighbors? God puts up with you when you act the same. "He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Luke 6:35 NIV).

Can't we love like this?

Not by ourselves we can't. Oh, we may succeed for a time. We, like Simon, may open a door. But our relationships need more than a social gesture. Some of our spouses need a foot washing. A few of our friends need a flood of tears. Our children need to be covered in the oil of our love.

But if we haven't received these things ourselves, how can we give them to others? Apart from God, "the heart is deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9 NIV).

The apostle John models the right sequence. He makes a deposit before he tells us to write the check. First, the deposit:

God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. (1 John 4:9-10 NLT)

And then, having made such an outrageous, eye-opening deposit, John calls on you and me to pull out the checkbook: "Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other" (v, 11 NLT).

The secret to loving is living loved. This is the forgotten first step in relationships. Remember Paul's prayer in his letter to the Ephesians? "May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love" (Eph. 3: 17 NLT). As a tree draws nutrients from the soil, we draw nourishment from the Father.

Old Simon had the same problem most real Christmas trees do-- separated from their roots, they grow dry and brittle. Impressive to look at for a short while, nicely decorated, but he falls apart when you brush up against him.

Does bumping into certain people leave you brittle, breakable, and fruitless? Do you easily fall apart? If so, your love may be grounded in the wrong soil. It may be rooted in their love (which is fickle) or in your resolve to love (which is frail). John urges us to "rely on the love God has for us" (1 John 4:16 NIV, emphasis mine).

Many people tell us to love. Only God gives us the power to do so.

We know what God wants us to do, but how can we? How can we be kind to the vow breakers? To those who are unkind to us? How can we be patient with people who have the warmth of a buzzard and the tenderness of a porcupine? How can we forgive the money grubbers and back stabbers in our lives? How can we love as God loves? We want to. We long to. But how can we?

By living loved. By following the 7:47 Principle: Receive first, love second. Rather than let this scripture remind us of a love we cannot produce, let it remind us of a love we cannot resist--God's love.

Some of you are so thirsty for this type of love. Those who should have loved you didn't. Those who could have loved you didn't. You were left at the hospital. Left at the altar. Left with an empty nest, or an empty bed. Left with a broken heart. Left seeking an answer to the question "Does anybody love me?"

Please listen to Jesus' answer. God loves you. Personally. Powerfully. Passionately. His love-- if you will let it-- can fill you and leave you with a love worth giving. And his love will never stop, never let you go.

And the payoff? Let us once more read from the gospel according to Dickens, "It is a far, far better thing you do, than you have ever done; it is a far, far better love to which you go than you have ever known.

#### THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Our Father, we have come to a point once again where we are alarmed by the violence and injustice of the society we have built, and recognize that it is the product of our own selfish desire and perverse view of what is just. We know that this is not your doing, but we also recognize that we are powerless to correct it without drawing upon your own infinite wisdom to chart a new path for our nation. We cannot forget the anguish and the anger which was perpetrated over the last week. But even in this darkness we are not without light, and if there was much we did not know, there was much we did. We knew that however evil the world might be in spite of your Son's gift of grace, it is immeasurably better because of him. We also know that no matter who pulls the trigger that kills another of your children, there is no one among us who has not played a part in fashioning the gun and loading the bullet. In spite of our belief that Jesus sought justice for his people in a land washed clean of prejudice and hatred, of poverty and hunger, of fear and contention, we fail to take those actions that could end the violence and restore justice and mercy.

So save us from cowardice, our Father; save us from weakness. Deny us the comfort of saying that we do not know what to do or how to get there. The promised land is still before us, and the path of grace walked by our savior and other great men and women after him is clear: So let us deny ourselves and take up his cross and follow him." We cannot claim the bliss of ignorance, and we pray that you will forgive us the sin that in every act of hatred or indifference we have known or had the means of knowing what we did. Chasten and cleanse us, Lord, and make us such instruments of your powerful grace that within our own hearts and minds and wills, the deaths of this week which came to early, may not have come too late. May the memories of the sorrows that disciplined our spirits keep us humble and make us grateful for your deliverance. Help us to repay in service to others the debt of your unmerited mercies, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Grace Alone", number 2162 in our *Sing the Faith* hymnal supplements.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Grace Alone"

*Sing the Faith* #2162

THE BLESSING

\*THE CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Freely, Freely"

Freely, freely, you have received. Freely, freely give.

Go in my name and because you believe, others will know that I live.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis