

Fruits of Repentance

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Today we have read the first of three stories in the Gospel of Luke that deal with extraordinary forgiveness. Today we are told of a woman of the streets who is allowed to express her love for Jesus in what could appear an unseemly way. Another story in Luke is the parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal wastes his father's money on sinful living. Yet he is welcomed back with great joy by his father. The third story is of the tax collector, Zacchaeus. Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus home for dinner.

In all three of the stories we find people who objected to the forgiveness Jesus offered. They felt that Jesus removed the social walls that should separate good persons from bad ones. In the beginning of his public ministry Jesus refers to himself as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives... to let the oppressed go free."

As is true in our modern world, in Jesus time prostitutes were usually victims of social injustice. Jesus assured the woman in today's Gospel that she was forgiven and that she had a right to be respected by society. Jesus also tells the so-called "good person" he needs to look at his own sins rather than **to condemn** others. Already in condemning the woman Simon, the Pharisee, had forgotten how badly he offended Jesus as a guest in his home. In condemning another he was unaware of his own faults.

The human ego loves to condemn the wickedness of others. We all like to feel superior. In criticizing another person, we even project our own faults onto some else. Condemnation that we should aim at ourselves is conveniently loaded onto others. It is generally assumed that what we hate most in others is our own predominant fault, a helpful point in examining our own consciences.

Some modern moralists think that we could better understand "sin" if we thought of it as alienation. When we sin, we are thinking only of ourselves. This cuts us off from ourselves, from others, from anything that has meaning, from God. It is a destruction of our capacity for relatedness. It means being separated _{from} the ground of life. The tendency to selfishness could be thought of as original sin. Ego is so pervasive that it seems like normal life. That's just the way things are.

Simon, the Pharisee, was so filled with himself, he did not realize his separateness, his alienation. The sinful woman, with her new found capacity to love, overflows with life. Jesus holds her up as an example to Simon. Pharisees, who hated Jesus, have been described: they had learned how to adapt to the small space that their minds had made into a barricaded dwelling. In the free life of the sinful woman the prison of Simon has been exposed. In the presence of grace sin is clearly seen.

The seriousness of sin is that it teaches us to believe lies about ourselves, and defends those lies against the revelation of truth. In repentance we turn from these lies. We can find ourselves extravagant lovers of God and of neighbor. People lavishly burst into glorifying God. Zacchaeus

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found himself giving half his goods to the poor. We trade communion for separateness, belonging for alienation. We live by a greater life, the life of God. The alabaster jar is broken.

We pour sweet-smelling nard into the rooms of our lives.

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