

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 16, 2013
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Contrasting Needs

For the third Sunday in a row, St. Luke tells us about an encounter Jesus has that is surprising, even shocking. Two weeks ago we heard Luke's Gospel story about the Roman Centurion with a slave near death. Last week Luke told us about the widow whose only son had died. Today we meet a Pharisee and a woman "*who was a sinner.*"

Luke is a wonderful story teller and his stories are filled with examples of Jesus' compassion, his mercy, his forgiveness and love. Luke's Gospel is filled with stories about unique and surprising people who turn to Jesus. They know their need for God's love. Jesus responds to their needs; he restores the lost; he forgives the sinner; he heals the broken hearted.

So we might first ask, "What do we need from God? What do I need from Jesus?" Without knowing our needs for God's love and truth in our lives we become like the Pharisee.

We can invite Jesus into our lives. We can enjoy his company. But do we really want to get close to him? In today's story Jesus contrasts the needs of the woman with the lack of hospitality and intimacy the Pharisee shares with Jesus. "*You gave me no water...you gave me no kiss...you did not anoint my head with oil...*" Simon, the Pharisee keeps Jesus at a distance and even doubts his authority. "*If this man were a prophet he would have known who and what kind of woman this is...*"

In contrast the woman is so thankful for Jesus' mercy that she finds the courage, the freedom, the need to show Jesus her respect, her gratitude, her love. The religious elite don't really understand their own need for God's love and mercy. The poor, the sick, the outcast, the foreigner, the sinners all flock to Jesus because they know their need.

Two sets of parents, Eben and Carol and Meredith and John, bring their six month old babies, Luke and Parker, to Grace Church today proclaiming their need for the Church's Sacrament of Holy Baptism. In the liturgy we affirm our support, "*Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support Luke and Parker in their life in Christ? We will...*" As we prepare to baptize Luke and Parker we all renew our own baptismal promises. These two little children and their parents and godparents remind us of our need for God's love – our need to grow in our faith; our need for prayer and worship; our need for renewal and repentance; our need to share this good news with others; our need to look for Christ in all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being.

We may have contrasting needs for healing and health; we may be at different places in our life journeys; we may feel somewhat separated by age, by gender, by race,

by the amount of time we have belonged to Grace Church – this is a wonderfully diverse parish and we celebrate and rejoice in our diversity.

Yet St. Paul writes that we all need to be “*justified by faith in Christ...*” Justified means to live in right relationship; it means righteousness which really means a whole, healthy life. We all need to be fully alive by faith in Christ.

Who is fully alive, justified, in right relationship in today’s gospel, the Pharisee or the woman? What does it mean to be fully alive – not just physically, but also spiritually, emotionally, intellectually? What parts of our lives need to be restored, renewed, saved even? Jesus told the woman, “*Go in peace.*” Where do we find this peace in our lives?

Luke and Parker don’t really know the transformation about to take place in their lives. We know. They don’t yet understand their need for God. We understand. And they have very little idea of the special relationships that begin for them this day because of their baptisms. We see this as we receive them into the “*household of God,*” a house built upon God’s love, God’s compassion, God’s mercy and God’s forgiveness.

I need to be in this house. I need to know God’s love. I need surprising, even shocking, people to remind me that God loves us all.

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15

Galatians 2:15-21

Luke 7:36—8:3