

June 13, 2010 – Rev. Anne E. Hodges-Copples [PDF] (II Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15; Galatians 2:15-21; Luke 7:36-8:3)

This morning in the Old Testament and in the Gospel reading we are given two stories that have some somewhat interesting parallels. Both are about prophets, Nathan in the Old Testament reading, Jesus in the Gospel reading. Both have come in a sense as guests of the house, Nathan as the appointed prophet to the King, Jesus as the invited guest of Simon the Pharisee. And both have a word of judgment for the person who has the most power in the room. Both have a difficult assignment. Nathan has to tell the King that he is not fulfilling God's will, that David has transgressed. Now, David knows he's committed adultery. David knows that he has arranged for the murder of a loyal captain of the guard so that he might make Bathsheba his own wife. David knows what he's done wrong. So Nathan tells him a story. Nathan tells a story of a poor man with one little lamb. A rich man with many, a rich man who takes what little belongs to another and make its own and David is able to pronounce judgment upon the fictitious story. And then by Nathan holding up a mirror, David is able to see the judgment he must pronounce on himself.

Jesus also tells a story to his host. Jesus comes in – and I have to say Simon must be a very strange host. Simon is all upset because he's heard Jesus is gaining a reputation as a prophet, but Simon's a little unimpressed because after all, what kind of prophet would let a woman, an uninvited woman, a notoriously sinful woman, touch his guest's feet with her tears? Wash his feet with her hair? My question is, what kind of host is Simon for letting such a party crasher in in the first place? However, that is not where our attention is supposed to go to from this text. Jesus also tells a story. This time of two debtors. One who owes a small amount, one who owes an enormous amount. And Jesus asks Simon to pronounce the judgment. Simon is able to see that well, clearly, the greater debtor, the one who has had the more debts forgiven will be the one who loves the creditor more. But does Simon see himself in the story? The Gospel doesn't say so. But Jesus does confirm that Simon has judged the story rightly. But has he seen himself in it?

Jesus then reveals the judgment of the story, of the great gratitude of the woman who has been forgiven so much. Of Simon's failure in terms of being a host that could show welcome, could show right relationship, could show graciousness and hospitality. No, Simon - whereas David put himself above the law as kings and people with great power are want to do whereas David took his arrogance and greed and hubris and thought that the law did apply to him, Simon the Pharisee, the teacher of law, used the law to keep himself distant from community. Simon used the law and his own supposed righteousness not just to keep himself distant from this woman and her need, but to also distance himself from the law of love and hospitality and in fact, even from the very basis of the law of Torah, which is to welcome, welcome the stranger. That is where Simon has failed to welcome Jesus.

Where are we in these stories? That's why read these scripture lessons every morning. It's not just to go back in time and back in history, but to find ourselves in the story. Are we detached like Simon in our own righteousness in offering our own sort of meager signs of hospitality in assuming that's enough? Sure, Jesus, be here at this table just like I'm at this table. Are we always really welcoming Jesus or do we go through some motions? Are we the bewildered other dinner guest asking, "Who is this guy and what is he about?" Are we the sinner desperately

seeking forgiveness and admittance to the party? Are we the ones who know of God's forgiveness and out of our gratitude to God are ready to seek and serve Him in all persons, saints and sinners? Where are we? Well, maybe I'll hold up another story and we'll ask ourselves where we are.

There's a terrible story unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico. It is the opposite of a natural disaster. It is a human made disaster that is destroying, threatening wide swaths of nature. It is a story of enormous arrogance and greed. It is an environmental disaster on the scale of having an Exxon Valdez oil spill happen every five days it continues. It is an economic disaster on the scale of a major hurricane remaining over an area and refusing to blow away and dissipate. It is a political nightmare that is as sticky, messy and toxic as the emulsified ooze that is spreading across the ocean floor into our fragile wetlands and through our food chain. But we are happy to sit back and point the fingers, call the names. We will find someone to blame for what is happening in the Gulf. Where are we in the story? Detached because after all we reduce, reuse and recycle? Are we protected from this? Do we have a role? Are we willing to contemplate that we are the men and women who have committed adulterous and disastrous affair misusing and using energy in a way that puts not just nature at risk, but sends soldiers to wars, miners into unsafe working conditions, oil rig workers back out on rigs after they have been told it's too dangerous? Are we willing to see where we have sinned?

We would like to think it's ordinary time. A time to go to the beach. Have a good time. Enjoy the beautiful creation that God has given us. But I think we are again at Ash Wednesday. We are again at a time where we need to repent, confess and beg mercy and forgiveness. It is time again for Psalm 51 where we ask God, having admitted our sin, to create and renew within us a right spirit. Because once again the innocent of creation are bearing the brunt, are dying for the guilts and the sin of others.

David still had to deal with the consequences of his betrayal. To receive forgiveness is not to receive automatic miracles and a waiving away of consequences. David had to live the rest of his life with the consequences of his sin. This notorious woman of Jerusalem lived the rest of the life with the consequences of her sin, whatever they were – and by the way, Jesus didn't ask her, did he? But what she did is instructive. She humbled herself. She used what little she had – her tears, her hair, her body – to beg forgiveness. And what is it that forgiveness does? Forgiveness frees us. Forgiveness asks us to stand up and step out and to act. We will not find easy fixes, quick answers, a gentle way out of this oozing and terrible sickness that is spreading through our ecosystems and through our land. But we can find a path that is humble. A path that says that it matters that we use less energy, that we are in right relationship to creation. We can find patterns of life, habits of hearts and mind and body that ask us to be gentle upon this earth and to seek justice for those who will suffer in the path of this destruction.

We will ask for renewed spirits to reduce the impact of our lives, of our harsh lives, of our addiction – we need a 12-step program for our addiction to energy that says we are powerless, and yet we will seek the power of God to change the ways we live in this world and to change our relationship with creation. I don't know what that looks like in your life. I will work on my life. I beg you to work on yours. But that together we will form and re-form and transform our ways of being in this world that in addition to those famous public policy words – reduce, reuse,

recycle, as important as those are – we will return to our religious words - repent, return to the Lord and rejoice that He will give us today and another day to honor creation, to seek and serve Christ in all of creation and to work anew for generations to come that they may know the beauty of the earth created for us. Amen.