

PENTECOST: IN FAITH WE RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6)

June 17, 2007

2 Samuel 11:26—12:10, 13-15

Psalm 32

Galatians 2:15-21

Luke 7:36—8:3

Forgiven Yet Not Forgotten

This week's reading from Luke's Gospel narrates one of the most beautiful stories in the New Testament, one that is found in all four Gospels (see also Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; and John 12:1-8). Mark's version of the story concludes with Jesus' promise that "wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (14:9).

It's not surprising, then, to find the story in each of the four Gospels, and neither is it surprising that each evangelist tells the story in his own way. But Luke's telling of the story modifies the plot so significantly that it garners a new designation altogether. In Matthew, Mark, and John, the *Revised Standard Version* titles the passage, "The Anointing at Bethany." But in Luke's Gospel it is titled, "A Sinful Woman Forgiven."

The portrayal of Jesus in Luke's version of the story is strikingly different from what one finds in the other Gospels. Moreover, the anonymity of the woman invites the reader to participate in the story in a completely different way. The ambiguity surrounding her – the fact that we know quite well "who and what sort of woman this is" (7:39b, *RSV*) and yet the narrator doesn't reveal her name – draws us into the text and asks us to consider how much has been forgiven.

The apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 2:15-21 that it is our faith in Jesus Christ that justifies us. But what is perhaps most important to note is that our entire identity is changed on a fundamental level in and through that faith and the justification that follows. In one of the most well-known sentences ever written by the apostle, he exclaims, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (2:20 *RSV*).

We must let go of ourselves in order to fully grasp hold of Jesus. Is our individuality then lost as a result? No. But the ground of our identity is profoundly altered. It has become relational, inextricably intertwined with the One who has forgiven us of all our sins, "which are many" (Luke 7:47, *RSV*).

This week's Reflection was prepared by Scott S. Elliott, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Translations Officer in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship. Mr. Elliott (ABD) is

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Switzerland –

With thanks to God for the publication by the Reformed Church in Zurich of the revised Zurich Bible, and with prayers that this translation will help people to interact with God's Word; **Austria** – With thanks to God for the many visitors, including school and church groups and tourists, coming to the Bible Centre in Vienna, and for opportunities to distribute Scriptures to refugees and prisoners.

Activity Corner: “Joy of Forgiveness” Prayer

Supplies needed: Bible; 8-1/2” x 11” construction paper (assorted colors); pens or pencils; scissors.

Read together Psalm 32. Consider reading it antiphonally (women/girls reading the odd-numbered verses, men/boys reading the even-numbered verses; everyone reading verse 11) or gathering in a circle with each one taking a turn reading a verse. In a number of translations, this psalm is entitled, “The Joy of Forgiveness.” Discuss the psalm, verse by verse: What is the double blessing that the psalm writer introduces (verses 1-2)? How does the psalm writer describe the burden of sin (verses 3-4)? What brings about a change (verse 5)? What advice does the psalm writer offer (verse 6)? How does the psalm writer describe God (verse 7)? What advice is given in verses 8-9? What is the concluding message (verses 10-11)?

Distribute a sheet of construction paper to each member of your household. Fold the paper in half so that it measures 8-1/2” x 5-1/2” and ask each one to trace their hand, with the wrist against the fold. Cut out the hand, retaining part of the hand against the fold so that the “folded” hands will open. On the front write, “The Joy of Forgiveness;” on the inside, encourage each one to write their own prayer, asking for God's forgiveness and thanking God for the joy of forgiveness. Conclude by singing “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling,” or “I Lay My Sins on Jesus” or one of your favorite hymns.