

# Sermon: Pentecost 4

The Rev. Mike Wernick

June 12, 2016

Year C

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

Psalm 32

Galatians 2:15-21

Luke 7:36-8:3

We can't escape the laws of physics... at sea level... water boils at 212° F... but one mile up... where the air's less dense... it boils at 202° F... according to these laws... every action has an equal and opposite reaction... so when I walk... and push my foot to move forward... I'm also pushing the earth backward... but context also matters... if I drop a hammer and a feather here... at the same moment... gravity pulls them towards the center of the earth... but because of air resistance... the hammer hits first... but if I push off the earth really hard... with thousands of pounds of thrust... in a rocket ship... and go fast enough to escape the earth's gravity... and land on the moon... and drop them there... both at the same time... where there's virtually no atmosphere to create resistance... they both fall at the same speed... and I think many of you have seen that video from Apollo 15...

It doesn't take much escape velocity to break the laws that men and women make... if you run a red light... you may or may not have an accident... or get a ticket... but context matters... there are some laws that change over time... there was once a law in Detroit that said you may not willfully destroy your own radio...

This weekend... Jewish people celebrate Shavuot... the receiving of the Law as revealed to Moses and recorded in the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures... the Torah...

And some of what scripture says has changed over time too... for example... Ex. 21:7 says that I can sell my daughter into slavery... but scripture also says... as you sow... so shall you reap... though if every action has an equal and opposite reaction... and I

sneer at someone on the highway for cutting me off... I don't expect someone else to smile at me...

Some of the Laws from the Mitzvot... the 613 other commandments from scripture... tell us to examine the marks on a fish so you can tell the clean from the unclean... like not to eat a worm found in fruit... not to eat the flesh of an ox that was condemned to be stoned... [I wonder why]... not to wear garments made of wool and linen mixed together... this last one is interesting... one explanation said that the vestments of Israelite priests were made from this blend... and so it was against the Law to impersonate a priest... like it's against the Law to impersonate a police officer...

So there are laws about physical things... laws about how people interact... and laws about spiritual things... all which determine different kinds of cause and effect... in different kinds of contexts... some which create blessing and life... like... love if you want to be loved... and forgive if you want to be forgiven... and some which lead to sin and death... but let's remember that in Isaiah 43:25... God reminds us... says... I am He who blots out your transgressions... for my own sake... I will not remember your sins...

In today's reading from 2 Samuel... we have David's story... David had already slept with Bathsheba... she already carried his son... but when Uriah came back from battle... he tried to get him to lie with her... to make it look like the child was his... to cover the breaking of the law... but Uriah would not... so David arranged that he would die in battle... in David's context... his position as King blinded him to the Law... made it easier for him to violate boundaries... made it easier for him to sin... just as white privilege can sometimes blind us... make it easier for us to skirt certain laws... because we feel entitled... David would be forgiven... but there would be a consequence...

In today's Gospel... when the woman from the city heard that Jesus would be at Simon's house... she went and stood behind him at his feet... weeping... and began to

bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair... and she kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment...

*Woman from the city*... is code-talk for being a prostitute... and when Simon saw what she was doing... he said: if this man were a prophet... he would have known who and what kind of woman this is... who is touching him... who is making him unclean... but Jesus tells a parable too... just as Nathan did... a parable which indicts Simon... he asks Simon about the forgiveness of debt... and Simon answered rightly...

But here's the interesting thing... how did Simon know who this woman was... or what she did... how many of the men there knew who this woman was... she is not named... but is objectified... the way men can objectify women... in this context... maybe Simon tries to shame her to protect himself... maybe the other men are silent because they don't want to draw attention to themselves... but Jesus isn't so much concerned with this... the focus of Jesus' story... the key... is attention...

Today's reading from Galatians is interesting to me... because I too am a Jew by birth... I grew up with an appreciation for the Law... for cause and effect... and it took some time for me to understand Grace... I'm still learning... but although as Reform Jews... we didn't try to follow the 613 Mitzvot... I think I'm justified by my faith in Christ... justified because I have died to my old self and have been reborn from above because of a new awareness... I am justified because I have let go of... the idea that it's all up to me... that in my human brokenness... I am relieved of trying to fulfill every detail... every nuance of the Law... to read every clothing label... and to examine every fish before it is scaled... that doesn't mean those Laws are meaningless... they establish some health guidelines and some degree of accountability... and we can't have community without accountability... but the Law gives us an external reference point... until the internal one is developed... and realized... and we become aware of ourselves...

The woman whose son Jesus raised... asked for nothing... the woman at Simon's home asks for nothing... but Jesus... who knows radical grace... forgiveness... and hospitality... Jesus... whose mind is Christ consciousness... just gives... and Jesus says... when you're willing to let go of violating boundaries... when you're willing to let go of judging who other people are... when you're willing to let go of those tapes in your head that tell you how worthless you are... when you're willing to let go of addiction... when you're willing to let go of resentment... I'll take those things from you... and give you new life...

The laws of physics are impersonal... gravity doesn't mind who you are or what you've done... the laws written by men and woman change and almost always arise in response to something that's happened... but the Law that's written on our hearts always responds to context rightly... and rejects works righteousness because it's not about what we do... but who we are...

Maya Angelou wrote: "I've learned that people will forget what you said... people will forget what you did... but people will never forget how they felt when they were with you."

David was blind to his sin... it took Nathan's parable to make him aware of it... and he felt regret... Simon... a Pharisee who knew the Law... may have tried to change the subject... but even in his own home... he wasn't as good a host as this unnamed woman... and he felt embarrassed... but this woman is the one who needs no parable to see her sin... she's the one who already feels remorse and is aware of it... no matter who she is or what she's done... she's the only one who is already seeking forgiveness... and as an expression of that... as an expression of how she feels... she lavishes her appreciation and love on Jesus... her awareness of her sin is part of her faith... and her faith has saved her...

Let us pray: God in Christ... give us your mind... write your Law on our hearts... help us to see our own beam before we see our neighbor's splinter... blot out our transgressions... and let our faith save us too... Amen.

Mike+