

Third Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-8:3
Date preached: June 13, 2010

Grace to you and peace from God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

One of the things that Amy and I have had the joy of doing over the years is hosting parties, dinners of get together events at our home. It is something that gives us joy, to spend time with people important to us.

However, one of the things that go into our hosting of events is the preparation that it takes. It is planning a menu, setting out the food, and making sure everything is just right so that our guests may relax and have an enjoyable time.

Now consider with me how this relates to our worship every week. Each week the staff tends to the work of preparing us for worship, with great care, skill, devotion and love. Many other members of our congregation add your time doing the little not so noticeable things in getting ready that if they were not done, would be missed.

It may be easy for us to overlook some of the details from time to time. And when we miss the important details the message that is implicitly spoken is the

exact opposite of what we've hoped to communicate. When we have given attention to the details of hosting the message not only sent is that you are welcome, but more significantly, you've been expected.

Being a gracious host however takes us beyond the physical details of preparation. The real work of hosting comes with interaction we have with the guest.

Have we helped the visitors find their way around a building that can be very confusing to guests? Have we greeted someone we didn't know this morning, introduced ourselves and thank them for being with us? Are we attentive to the struggles that guests may have following along in our worship service?

When we look at this issue through the lens of the Gospel text this morning, Jesus points us to the host in this story, and it isn't Simon. In fact, the one who serves as the host is an unnamed woman who is crashing the party so to speak. Simon is not pleased with her, and in his own mind is calling into question Jesus as a prophet. "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who is touching him—that she is a sinner."

Now we know that Jesus is more than a prophet. We know Jesus is our Savior and Lord. And we know that Jesus forgives sins. This brings us to the two radical aspects of our Gospel reading.

The first is that the uninvited guest is the true host. She is the one attentive to Jesus, showing care, devotion and love. She recognizes Jesus in a way Simon does not. And in so doing, she demonstrates true hospitality which Jesus connects to showing great love.

The second radical aspect of the Gospel reading is that Jesus is bold enough to forgive sins, and proclaim that forgiveness publically. “Simon I tell you, her sins which were many, have been forgiven.”

This leaves Simon speechless. He is left to ponder, who is this person whom he suspected was a prophet, but actually forgives sins. In his mind this was something only God can do. And that too is the irony. Jesus, the guest is the very Son of God, who turns out to be the true host of the Kingdom of God which boldly proclaims forgiveness.

In our worship, as hard as we might prepare for the guest while giving attention to our hosting, what we are in actuality doing is coming to this place of

worship as guests, seeking forgiveness. We are among the multitude for whom much has been forgiven. As we reflect on our own lives, remember that it is for us and for our salvation that Christ died on the cross. As recipients of this grace, we live not perfectly; but as forgiven children of God.

This is why it is so important for us to be the host for the stranger in our midst. By being attentive to the needs of those who worship with us be it on Sundays or at funerals or weddings, what we do in hosting is to care for Jesus who comes in our midst through the face of the stranger. For it is stated in Hebrews 13:1-2, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Being an attentive host clears the way for the guest to receive what we have to offer. What we offer is not membership. What we offer is not our private possession. What we offer is what we have first received, the forgiveness of our sins. What we offer is the grace of God that transforms lives.