

## A NEW FUTURE

Forgiveness opens up the future. That makes forgiveness very powerful. Forgiveness can create something new and wonderful. Forgiveness can change lives. Forgiveness can change the course of history. Forgiveness is one of the greatest powers in the world.

And it is also one of the hardest things in the world to do.

Take the story we just heard. Jesus is dining at the home of a Pharisee named Simon. Remember - the Pharisees were actually the good guys in those days. The Pharisees were the ones that cared deeply about their religion. They were the elders, church council members, Sunday School superintendents - they were the church leaders of that day.

So Jesus is dining in a Pharisee's home, when all of a sudden a woman - and not just any woman, but a woman with a reputation - and not a good reputation, mind you, but a really, really bad reputation - breaks in and starts weeping at his feet, literally bathing his feet with her tears. Then she dries them with her hair and kisses them and anoints them with oil. It's hard to over emphasize the scene this would have created. This was scandalous, the kind of event that makes the tabloids. Which is exactly what Simon, the Pharisee, was thinking, "If this man were really a prophet, he'd know what kind of woman this is who is touching him - that she is a sinner!"

Yes, Jesus knew what kind of a woman she was. And he had forgiven her. And she knew Jesus had forgiven her and she just had to express what it meant to her. And all the while Simon was judging her. He was thinking we're good, but she is bad. We're right, but she is wrong. We belong in here with Jesus, but she doesn't. Get the picture?

Of course, Simon was right. She was bad. She was wrong. She didn't belong with Jesus. Simon was making the kind of judgments we all make. The kind of judgments we teach our children. The kind of judgments society uses to maintain order. We have to identify law breakers, trouble makers, sinners and avoid them. Can you imagine what would happen if we erased the line between right and wrong, between good and evil, between law breakers and law abiders? Would you want to live in such a place?

Are you beginning to see why forgiveness is so hard?

Forgiveness up-ends everything. Forgiveness destroys the old categories. Forgiveness is destabilizing. And that is scary. We worry what will happen if we forgive. We fear that sin will be given a green light, that evil will snowball. And we imagine we will slide down the slippery slope into hell itself.

But Jesus did just that! He forgave this woman. Freely. Completely. Unconditionally.

Just like he forgives you. Freely. Completely. Unconditionally. No matter what you have done. No matter how bad your sin. No matter what others think. No matter what you think about yourself. Jesus forgives you. He takes away your sin. He completely removes it from you. He erases the slate. He washes you, baptizes you, makes you clean.

No longer does the sin cling to you. No longer does the sin define you. No longer does the sin condemn you. You are free!

So now what? What will you do now that you are forgiven? Remember, forgiveness opens up the future. Forgiveness creates totally new possibilities. As Tuli Kupferburg said, "When patterns are broken, new worlds emerge." And forgiveness breaks down the old patterns.

The woman in today's story was so changed by the forgiveness of Jesus that she wept at his feet and anointed them with oil. She was forgiven and as a result, she showed lavish love. We are not told, but I doubt that she went back to the streets. I suspect she joined Mary Magdalene and Joanna and the other women who followed Jesus. Forgiveness changed her life.

You have been forgiven. How will you lavishly express your love for Christ? How will forgiveness change your life? How will it change how you relate to others? What will you do now that you are forgiven?

And what about us as a group? What does forgiveness say to us - to those of us who gather around the Table of the Lord? What does it say to the church? When sinners are forgiven do we send them back to the streets? Or do we help them find new possibilities and new relationships? What sinners need is a community of forgiven and forgiving sinners. Can we be such a community? Can we be people who do not judge, but say "you are welcome here?"

Forgiveness is facing the future without the weight of the past. You have been forgiven. So what will you do with your new future?