

11.16.2025 Trinity 22 (Philippians 1:3-5; Matthew 18:21-35)

*“I thank my God every time I remember you. In every prayer for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now”* (Philippians 1:3-5). These words, from the Epistle we read this morning, are St. Paul’s words to the Christians he knew and loved and ministered to in Philippi. These were Christians who were not only placed in Paul’s care, they were people who loved and cared for him, who partnered with him in the mission to build the Church and proclaim the Gospel of our Lord, and I speak these words to you this morning because the love, thankfulness, and joy he expressed in his letter to them immediately reminded me of my love for you, the way I pray for you, and how thankful I am for *your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now*.

The Philippians had a special place in Paul’s heart, St. Paul had a special place in theirs, and the love that bound them together in the first century is just as present and powerful here at St. Andrew’s in the twenty-first century, because it isn’t a love of natural affection or friendship that guides us through the church doors. Instead, it is God, who is love (1 John 4:8), who calls us by name to enter into the Body of Christ. Like the Father created, formed, and called the people of Israel by name (Isaiah 43:1), like the Son called out to *“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down”* from that tree (Luke 19:5), the Spirit of God called you and I here today to *“Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him”* (Psalm 34:8).

We have tasted and seen, and it is the grace and mercy of God, His Divine love and forgiveness that draws us here today, to the house of the Lord, where we enter into the intimacy of communion with God and with one another, and thinking of the love we share, *“God’s love”* that *“has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 5:5), brings to mind a truth spoken by our Lord about the relationship between forgiveness and love, the truth that the one who is forgiven much, loves much, and the one who is forgiven little, loves little.

Jesus made this statement in the house of a Pharisee named Simon. St. Luke tells us that our Lord had been invited to dinner there, and that while He was seated a woman *“who was a notorious sinner in that city... took an alabaster*

*jar of perfume and knelt at His feet behind Him. She was crying and began to wash His feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. Then she kissed His feet over and over again, anointing them constantly with the perfume.”*

Simon the Pharisee saw this and said to himself, *“If this man were a prophet, He would have known who is touching Him and what kind of woman she is. She’s a sinner! Then Jesus, knowing his thoughts, said, I have something to ask you... Two men were in debt to a moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii, and the other 50. When they couldn’t pay it back, he generously canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more? Simon answered, I suppose the one who had the larger debt canceled. Jesus told him, You have answered correctly.”*

*“Then, turning to the woman, he told Simon, Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You didn’t give me any water for my feet, but this woman has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn’t give me a kiss, but this woman, from the moment I came in, has not stopped kissing my feet. You didn’t anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with perfume. So I’m telling you that her sins, as many as they are, have been forgiven, and that’s why she has shown such great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little” (Luke 7:36-47).*

The one who’s been forgiven much loves much, but the one who’s forgiven little loves little, and certainly we’ve all seen that truth manifested in daily life. We’ve seen those who, in their relationship with Jesus, resemble this humble, desperate woman who knelt at her Lord’s feet and washed them with her tears. People like her, who pour out their lives as a costly perfume in such a way that the fragrance of heartfelt gratitude and love fills the room and becomes a blessing not only to our Lord and God, but also to the world He died to save. However, in daily life we also see people who look more like Simon, the proud Pharisee, who invited Jesus, the itinerant preacher into his home for dinner, but nothing more. No water. No oil. No outpouring of affection. Simon, the self-righteous Pharisee, who was more concerned with the sins of this woman than he was with own.

In this Pharisee’s house, and in daily life, we see two very different ways that people can respond to the grace and forgiveness offered by our Savior Christ,

and our Gospel lesson today is a warning to those who choose to respond with the same kind of indifference as Simon the Pharisee. In the parable we heard this morning, Jesus told the story of a servant who owed his king ten thousand talents, an enormous debt he couldn't repay. When the king ordered the man, his wife, children, and all that he had to be sold because he couldn't pay the debt, the servant fell down and begged for mercy, and his king, being moved with compassion, forgave him the entire debt.

The compassionate king took the servant's debt, and placed it entirely upon himself. He paid the price the servant owed, just as our King bled and died on the Cross to pay the debt we owed, but this servant, instead of being overwhelmed with gratitude and love after receiving such an amazing gift of grace, instead of offering to others the gift he'd received, he went out and found one of his fellow-servants and had him cast into prison because he owed him a measly hundred pence. Well when the king heard of this, he was furious, and Jesus tells us that the king *"delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him"* (Matthew 18:34).

The fate of this unforgiving servant shows us that the gift offered by our Lord is more than just forgiveness. The gift offered by our Savior Christ is forgiveness and a heart quick to forgive others, and as we see in the parable, if we do not receive God's gracious gift in its entirety, in the end, we'll receive none of it. Notice, the servant was forgiven the entire debt, but by selfishly stopping there, by welcoming forgiveness for his trespasses but rejecting the thought that he should forgive those who've trespassed against him, he received only part of the gift, and this led to him losing it all. As Jesus said, *"If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6:15).

This parable clearly teaches us that cancelling our debt is only the beginning of the gift of redemption that God the Father offers us through the Cross of Christ. Yes, as we read in Scripture, God has forgiven *"us all our trespasses, having cancelled the debt ascribed to us... He took it away, nailing it to the Cross!"* (Colossians 2:13-14), but if receiving such forgiveness doesn't make us humbly aware of the depth of our fall and the infinite price God paid to reach down and lift us up, then we look a lot like Simon the Pharisee, who thinking he'd only sinned a little, was forgiven little, and loved little; and if

receiving such forgiveness doesn't give us a heart quick to forgive, then we look like the unforgiving servant, who selfishly desired only part of God's gift, and therefore ended up losing it all.

There are two very different ways that people can respond to the Divine forgiveness offered by our Savior Christ. We can act with the indifference and ingratitude of Simon the Pharisee and the unforgiving servant, or we can respond in the same way that a humble, sinful woman responded when she was met with the offer of forgiveness. By the grace of God, we can kneel down at our Lord's feet with thankful hearts transformed by the infinite depth of God's forgiving love. Like her, we can pour out our lives as costly perfume allowing that fragrance to fill the room - blessing our Lord and God, and the world He died to save.

We've all been forgiven much, and at an infinite cost. Remember, it was not our sin alone that was nailed to the Cross - it was our Savior. We ought to love much, and in closing I'd ask you to take a moment to consider how *much* love is expressed in your life. Perhaps we could begin here in this room, knowing that if we don't receive Divine love here, and offer that love properly inside these walls, then we certainly won't do so outside of them. So, start here, think about your brothers and sisters in Christ, those of the household of faith. Do your thoughts, words, and deeds toward them express Divine love? Does what you think of them, the way you speak to them, and how you act toward them resemble the love of St. Paul for the Philippians, the love of the Philippians for St. Paul, or the love expressed by that humble woman in the Pharisee's home? Like her, are you the person who's found kneeling at the feet of another, remembering that Jesus said, "*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me*" (Matthew 25:40)? Are you pouring out your life, and God's love, as a costly perfume with a beautiful fragrance that fills this room?

Those who've been forgiven little love little, but those who've been forgiven much love much. By the grace of God, may we love much.