"Your Sins Are Forgiven, Go in Peace"
Rev. Bill Freeman
Sunday, June 12, 2016
Menifee United Church of Christ

We're all sinners! But don't be alarmed. When I was in seminary, we learned that sin simply means missing the mark of perfection, making an error, making a mistake. I think sin means a little more than that, too, but our sins are forgiven.

Three pastors go to a pastors' convention. The three are from three small churches in a small town. They all share the same hotel room. The first one says, "Let's confess our secret sins to each other and then we can absolve ourselves of our sins." The first one says, "I'll go first. My sin is: I love to gamble. I can't pass a casino without stopping and losing hundreds of dollars." The second pastor says, "My secret sin is: I hate writing sermons, so I steal the sermons of other pastors and I read them word for word." The third pastor says, "My secret sin is: I'm a terrible gossip, so I can't wait to get back to our small town!"

We're all sinners. Seneca knew that. Seneca was a Roman philosopher back around Jesus' time. Seneca says, "Other men's sins are before our eyes; our own are behind our backs."

Ain't that the truth? We can see other people's sins from a mile away, but we ignore our own sins most times. Jesus said much the same thing. Jesus said, "You see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but you don't see the log in your own eye." We all sin, but we don't always see our own sin, we see other people's sins.

Jesus forgives our sins. Jesus is invited by a Pharisee to come to dinner at his house. So Jesus is sitting at the table and in walks a woman, carrying an alabaster jar. She anoints Jesus' feet with the ointment and she sheds tears and washes his feet with her tears and dries his feet with her hair. The woman is a sinner, but we're not told in the passage in Luke what her sin is, although commentators say that she is likely a woman of the evening. Jesus says to her, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

The Pharisee and other people around the table think, "Well, who is this guy, Jesus, who thinks he can forgive sins?" But that's what Jesus does. Jesus forgives our sins. Regardless of what our sins are, Jesus forgives them. And some people have a hard time accepting that Jesus can forgive our sins, like that Pharisee. But again, that's what Jesus does, that's what Jesus is all about. Jesus forgives our sins, whatever they are.

A man murders ten people in LA. He's called the Grim Sleeper. He's convicted and sentenced to death.

Does Jesus forgive his sins? Would we? If one of his victims was one of our loved ones? Would we forgive his sins? We remember that when Jesus was hanging from the cross, he looked at those who put him there and said, "Forgive them, God, for they know not what they do." Jesus was able to forgive those who nailed him to the cross. And Jesus tells us how to forgive. Jesus says, "Don't just forgive seven times, forgive seventy times seven times!" Would we forgive a murderer? The good news is: we don't have to. That's God's job. That's Jesus' job. According to the Bible, if they are Christians and repent of their sins, Jesus forgives everybody. That's what Jesus does.

Jesus wants us to be on the right road. If we ever take the wrong road, Jesus wants us to get on the right road. Paul is on the road to Damascus. At that time, Paul was called Saul. Paul was persecuting Christians, sometimes to the point of death. Saul stood by and held the cloaks of those who murdered, martyred, Stephen. Now Saul is heading to Damascus to persecute some more Christians. All of a sudden he is blinded by a light. He hears a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul says, "Who are you?" The voice says, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus sends Saul to Damascus. He's blind, he has to be helped. But after three days he receives his sight. He becomes a Christian. He changes his name from Saul to Paul. He's baptized. He becomes perhaps the greatest evangelical Christian ever. He writes more than half of the New Testament. He founds many churches. Saul was on the wrong road, and Jesus put Paul on the right road.

Has that happened to us? Have we been on the wrong road in our lives? And then Jesus gets us on a better road? Jesus calls to us maybe? Has that happened to you? That's what Jesus does. Jesus gets us on the right road.

An elderly woman is trying to cross the road. But there are three lanes of traffic; the road is very busy. Traffic is coming fast. Nobody stops for the elderly lady to cross. But then a car does stop in the first lane, and a man gets out and helps the elderly lady across the first lane. Then he gets the other two lanes of traffic to stop, and he helps the elderly lady across. Now I'm not suggesting the people who drove by that elderly lady and didn't let her cross were sinners. We're all in our own little world sometimes; we have places to go and people to see. But I am suggesting that

the man who stopped had compassion, showed that woman compassion. And I would suggest that compassion is the opposite of sin. Compassion is the opposite of sin.

What is sin? We talked about it a little bit before, that it's missing the mark, that it's making an error, that it's making a mistake. But I think sin is a little more than that. I believe sin is when we intentionally injure another person or ourselves – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. Sin is when we intentionally injure another person or ourselves – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. And the reason it's sin is because we are all made in the image of God. We are children of God. So if we sin against other people or ourselves, we are sinning against the image of God, we are sinning against God! That's what makes it sin. We're intentionally injuring others or ourselves – physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

God wants us to recognize, be aware of, our sin. God forgives our sin, but God wants us to be aware when we sin.

In 2 Samuel, King David has committed adultery with Bathsheba. Bathsheba becomes pregnant with David's child. It has to be David's child because her husband Uriah is fighting a war, ironically for King David, so it couldn't be his child. David tries to cover up one sin with another sin. He's already committed adultery and now he wants Uriah killed, so he makes sure that Uriah is sent to the front, where he surely will be killed. And he is. I guess you could say that Uriah was left in a heap on the battlefield. And David must have thought he was pretty slick, getting away with killing Uriah and then he marries Bathsheba. But God sends Nathan to David. Nathan tells David a story. Nathan says there's a rich man and a poor man. Nathan says that the rich man has lots of sheep, but the poor man has just one little lamb. But the rich man takes the poor man's one little lamb. Nathan says to David, "What should happen to the rich man?" David says, "Why, he should be put to death!" Nathan says to David, "You are that man!" David recognizes his sin and repents. God forgives him for his sin. God, according to Old Testament times, could have had David killed for killing Uriah, but he doesn't. He forgives David for his sin. That's what God does. God forgives us for our sin. But we need to be aware of our sin, I think. Although sometimes what we think is a sin really isn't.

A woman goes to the ladies' room. Another woman is coming out of the stall and the other woman goes into the stall and notices that the toilet seat is all wet. I don't want to give you too much information here, but the toilet seat is all wet and she thinks the previous woman was very rude, maybe even to the point of sinfulness, for leaving the toilet seat so wet. She cleans off the toilet seat and does her business, flushes the toilet, and water splashes up on the toilet seat. It wasn't the previous woman's fault at all. It was the fault of the toilet. She judged too quickly.

How many of us do that? How many of us judge somebody too quickly? I know I do sometimes. Sometimes what we think is sin isn't. It's not somebody's fault. But we have to forgive people even for their sins.

God forgives us for our sins. In Psalm 32, the psalmist, probably King David, writes about how God forgives us our sins. God forgives us for our transgressions, it says. God covers our sins. That's what God does. God forgives us for our sins. God covers our sins.

It's as if we had dinner with God and God picks up the check. "I'll cover that." God covers our sins. God forgives us for our sins and Jesus forgives us for our sins, and we're to forgive others and ourselves for our sins.

A guy came to see me about a week and a half ago. He was very distraught. He told me that he had committed many sins in his life. He didn't tell me what those sins were, but he said that he can't forgive himself for those sins. They were years ago, he no longer commits those sins, but he can't seem to forgive himself for his sins that happened years ago and could I help him?

Well, I'm not Jesus, so I didn't say, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." But I said: first of all you are a child of God. God created you. You are made in God's image. God blessed you. God loves you. God loves you unconditionally. No matter what you've done, God loves you. Then I said Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment. Jesus said to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. Then Jesus said a second is like it. You are to love your neighbor as you love yourself. I told the guy that, hidden within that second commandment is a third one: to love yourself. We are to love ourselves. He is to love himself and he is to forgive himself. Just like God forgives him and loves him no matter what. Just as Jesus forgives him and loves him no matter what. Basically I did say to the man, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." And I say that to you this morning. "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

Let us pray:

God of love,
Help us to know that you forgive us.
Help us to forgive others.

And help us to forgive ourselves
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.