

“Cutting Close to Home”

Text(s): 2 Samuel 11:26-12:10; 12:13-15 & Luke 7:36-8:3

- Pastor Mike Pancoast

I don't know about you, but there's a certain squeamish discomfort I have about our “story texts” (the texts that tell a story) today. And I know why I feel the way I do about them. It's because of their blatant honesty about the world as it is in all of its brokenness, in all of its warts and blemishes. You see, I'd rather deal with the world as I want it to be. Wouldn't you? I mean, we're polite and proper Midwesterners—we don't want to hear about kings caught in adultery and the resultant death that comes consequentially with those transgressions or publicly-known sinful women doing bizarrely uncomfortable things like kissing Jesus' feet...especially if those stories aim to have us name and confront the dark corners of our world...or worse yet, of our own lives. No thanks, pastor. Keep it abstract and distant, thank you very much. Given a choice between cutting close to home or being mildly baffled, I'll choose baffled, right? Of if you're gonna cut close to home, give us something safe and secure...give us something we can work on ourselves, something nice and polite like prayer...something we can intend to work on...something we can pretend to work on and still maintain our polite decency.

These are the kinds of texts that fit to a t what our Theology on Tap 20's & 30's small group was just talking about at this past week's topic on how we read Scripture. We were talking about how we Lutherans listen for TWO KINDS of words in the Scriptures—Law & Gospel—and how we can usually most readily identify how words of Law are working on us when we are confronted with words that elicit a reaction of discomfort, of ill-ease, or even down-right hostility. We talked about how we can even ask questions about the text: *What in this text makes you uncomfortable? What in this text do you hate hearing? What in this text do you want to avoid?* Our discomfort and reaction just might be God's Law working on us, if not shining light on the specifics of our brokenness, then perhaps raising the awareness of the brokenness of this world about which we'd rather be more comfortable not knowing...if knowing means having to be changed. That's why I don't like texts like these.

But God loves us and this world too much to leave us be in the muck and mire of this brokenness that clings so closely, even if we choose not to see it. He knows that, quite literally, there is hell to pay in the consequences of our actions...not so much in that God is watching and waiting to punish and to strike down, as in the uncomfortable ending to the Samuel text for today, as much as that God has created the world to work in a certain way, a way that revolves around love of God and love of our fellow human beings, and that when we seek to live beyond the way God has created the world to work in love, people die.

Sometimes those deaths are real enough to leave bodies strewn and bloody. Literally. We know, do we not, that the way we interact with alcohol or the way we behave behind the wheels of our cars can mean life or death for others, depending on our carelessness for ourselves and those others?

Sometimes those deaths are nonetheless real, even if there are no corpses. Adultery kills...even though there are no corpses. What we do with our bodies and with others' bodies are not inconsequential. Hearts can and are broken and scarred. Trust and fidelity...and the ability to be

trusted and to be faithful die.

A recent report from the National Institute of Mental Health indicates that approximately 7.7-million people in the U.S. live with some form of post-traumatic stress disorder, or about one in fifty people who walking dead, living with scars of the brokenness of this world, who have experienced the depths of human brokenness...not unlike those raised by our texts today.¹

We sinners wracked by the brokenness of this world long for another Word though too besides this Word of Law that we know so well and that we carry so closely even if we're not willing to admit it or be confronted by it. And it is this Word of Gospel that Jesus brings. It is this Word of Good News that Jesus IS...a Word of hope...a Word of comfort...a Word that brings new life...a Word that only can be heard by those who know and bear their brokenness before God.

It is no small article of faith—it's not just academic theology!—that we worship Jesus as the visibly embodied God. That God was born of flesh in Jesus for the intentional purpose of healing our broken flesh means even what we have wrecked, is not beyond repair. It is this body to which the woman in Luke's Gospel clings.

It is not just academic theology that we worship Jesus in the life he lived as described by the Gospel writers. That God lived a life that met humanity where it was, in all of its brokenness, and invited those broken lives back across the boundaries of sin and righteousness, back across the borders of death and life, back across the borders of alienation and communion with God means that even what we have wrecked is not beyond repair. It is in this life that Jesus meets the woman who for herself has no answer for the charges about "what kind of woman this is who is touching Jesus."

It is not just academic theology that we worship Jesus in the death he died on the cross. That Jesus' was whipped and beaten, that he cried and died, that he bled and sweat, means that God knows, that God has fully experienced, that God is in solidarity with the beatings we inflict and receive, with the tears we cry and the deaths we die, with the blood we spill and the sweat under which we toil. It is in this death that some of the Gospel writers see this woman's anointing foreshadowing.

It is not just academic theology that we worship Jesus for the resurrection for which we long and hope. That Jesus was raised from the dead means that none of the deaths which we face...not those that snatch life away, not those that scar us or with which we scar others...are beyond God's power for new life. It is this resurrection for which the women mentioned at the end of Luke's text today become the first preachers. It is upon their experience and their witness that our faith is built.

May this Word of Gospel hope grant God's grace and peace to you all.

¹ This statistic comes from the National Institute of Mental Health. Website accessed May 24, 2010. www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-numbers-count-mental-disorders-in-america/index.shtml#PTSD