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Pentecost 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Such Great Mercy!”

Text: Luke 7:36-8:3; 2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-14
(Galatians 2:15-21; 3:10-14)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our world today, mercy is a funny thing. On the one hand, people are sometimes very merciful. Think of the outpourings of mercy we see after disasters these days - people are eager to help and open their hearts and their wallets and often give of their time to do so. But on the other hand, mercy is sometimes in short supply. When someone comes back looking for help one time too many, or if they make the same mistake again, or when we think: *they've made their bed, now they can sleep in it*. So it seems that mercy is for those who've had something happen to them they didn't deserve - like a tornado, or a bombing; but *not* for those who are getting what they deserve - like after they've sinned, or just been plain stupid.

I think that's maybe why folks (even Christians) sometimes have a problem with God's mercy - it's bigger than ours. We *want* God to be merciful to those we think deserve it, and we like it when He is, but when He is merciful to those who we think don't deserve it . . . that's when our britches start getting in a bind, isn't it? Especially if you think you're being slighted in the mercy department and things aren't going so well for you, but God is being so good to . . . to her? To that *sinful* woman?

Welcome to God's kind of mercy, Simon! And all *you* Simons. Mercy for all. Mercy without limit. Mercy that is bigger than we can imagine. For it is mercy not linked to deserving, but true mercy. Mercy that makes no distinction between deserving and undeserving, between big sinners and little sinners, but is true mercy. Here for *all* mercy. Here for you mercy. For if Nathan were here today, his finger would be pointing at you. *You* are the man, he would say. *You* are the woman. For he would want you to know and receive God's mercy, too.

For to understand God's mercy we must first understand how deep our sin. How deep, deep. All the way down deep. Hopeless deep. Sinful woman deep. And confess not only that you have made some mistakes in your life, for we all make mistakes, after all. That's too easy. The truth is: we haven't just made mistakes, we've rebelled. We haven't merely tripped up, we've committed treason. For we

haven't just sinner against others, we've sinned against God. Enthroning ourselves and our wants and our desires and our thoughts of what should and shouldn't be, and dethroning God in our hearts. And not just once, but over and over again. Like David, one sin leading to another leading to another, and how often we too, instead of repenting, try to cover it up and get away with it.

And yes, we do that. You do that. One way is to make excuses for our sin. Another way is to try and hide it, like David. But maybe the biggest way today we try to deal with our sin is called the religion of self-improvement. This is the church of: I just need a little help, a boost of spiritual strength, some good advice or coaching on how to live . . . and then I'll be able to do it! To turn myself around. To do better. And that kind of religion is very popular in our day and age. The airwaves are full of that kind of spirituality. But to paraphrase what St. Paul was telling us today: *if I glue back together the mug that I broke, it still isn't much good, is it?* It may be improved and look a little better, but it's still broke. And I am still a breaker . . . a law breaker.

No, coaching and advice is not what we need. We know how we *should* live. The problem is: we don't. The problem is: we're broken. And we don't need gluing, we need forgiveness. We need to be made new. We need *mercy*.

Simon was a gluer. David was a gluer. The sinful woman, on the other hand, knew there wasn't enough glue in all the world for her. *How about you?*

Enter Jesus, the merciful. His presence in the world was for mercy. His presence in Simon's house that day was for mercy. His presence here today is for mercy. To show mercy in exposing our sin and bringing us to our knees in repentance. To show mercy in forgiving - especially those no one else would forgive. To show mercy to us all. True mercy. Mercy undeserved. Mercy that does not stop.

That's King David mercy. For how deep was his sin! Yet in mercy, God not only sent Nathan to expose the sin, bring David to his knees, and give forgiveness, but to mercifully keep David in His mercy. For if David fell so deeply into sin when things were good, then God, in mercy, sends strife to keep David in His mercy. ***The sword shall not depart from David's house, and the son born to him shall die.*** Those are not punishments for David's sin. When Nathan spoke the Word of the Lord to David and said, ***"God has put away your sin"*** - he meant it. David's sin is forgiven. Done. Gone. The rest is mercy. To keep David *from* sin. To keep David *in* repentance. To keep David *relying* on God. To keep David *in* God. Earthly hardship for eternal gain. A trade worth making.

But not only that. For in these words to David, we hear of an *even bigger* mercy of God. Because the son of David who would die for David's sin was not ultimately the son of David born to Bathsheba, but the Son of David born to Mary. For

remember all those folks we hear about in the Bible crying out to Jesus for help - what did they often cry out? *Jesus, **Son of David**, have mercy on us* (Luke 18:38)? For Jesus is not only the promised Son of David who will rule His people and help His people and sit on the throne forever. Jesus is also the promised Son of David who would die not just for David's sin, but for the sin of the world. For sinful men and sinful women of all times and places. For your sin and mine.

So while Nathan spoke the Word of God *to David* which said: **You are the man**, the sinner, the one deserving death . . . Jesus speaks the Word of God *to all* which says: *I am the man. I am the man* who came down from Heaven and became the man. *I am the man* who takes your sin off of you and puts it on myself. *I am the man* who came to be broken and die in your place. To take the curse of sin for you on the cross. To die for you, that you rise with Me. That you be not just an improved sinner but a new creation. That you not just be stronger but *set free* from sin and death and devil. That you be set free to live, and to love.

And in your baptism, that's exactly what happened. All that Jesus did for you became yours, given to you. God put away your sin by putting it on the Son of David on the cross. And those words spoken to David, and those words spoken to the sinful woman are spoken to you: *Your sin is put away . . . Your sins are forgiven . . . go in peace*. And we go - mercied, forgiven, new. To live a new life. A new life, for what do you think that sinful woman did next? Continue in her sin? Go on as if nothing had happened at all? Or love and mercy and forgive others as she had been? That's a new life set free. The burden of her reputation, which undoubtedly stuck with her, now but a merciful opportunity to speak of Jesus and His mercy, forgiveness, and love.

And so now for you. For you too have been forgiven much. And as we, in turn, care for others, as Jesus said (Mt 25), we are doing it unto Him. Not separating ourselves from sinners, like Simon, but taking our place with them, like Jesus. And while that may not get us invited to the dinner parties of today's high and rich and powerful who have other opinions of such mercy, that's okay - for you have been invited to another feast. An even greater feast. A *mercy* feast. Where you don't have to sneak in. You have the seat of honor. And you're not the one washing the feet, it is your feet that are being washed! By your host. Your Saviour. Serving you. And washing you not with water, but with the blood that flowed from Him. And with tears in *His* eyes, so happy is He that you are here! To eat His body and drink His blood. To receive His forgiveness and be given His life.

That's the mercy of Jesus, the Son of David, the Son of God. That's mercy that never ends. Mercy bigger and greater than we can imagine. The mercy of God who lowers Himself to us to raise us. Us sinners. Us Davids. Us sinful women. Us Simons. *Today His Mercy Call Us* (LSB #915) to wash away our sins. Yes, for He has

come to our house, our church, here. To mercy us. That we be sinful no more. That we now go filled with His peace. That we now go filled with His mercy.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.