



“Conversations with a Savior: A Sinner”

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
8:30 & 10:45 am, Saturday June 12, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

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

Grace and peace be to you from God Our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I can tell I am getting too old because I look at movies and I think they were relatively new, they just came out like five, six years ago and then I see when they actually came out and it was like two decades ago. For whatever reason they're still fresh in my mind and their impact is still great. There's a movie in particular that I want to share with you today, maybe you saw it, it was called *"The Sixth Sense."* It's a movie that starred Bruce Willis. He plays a psychiatrist who is working with a disturbed young boy named Cole. Now Cole is having a lot of adjustment problems you might say, it's hard for him to fit in with kids that are his age. He's being bullied, he's pretty much a loner, and his single mother is very, very concerned about him, and quite frankly doesn't understand what's going on with him. And so she wants help for him but she doesn't know what to do. Finally, there's this incident at a birthday party and Cole ends up going to the emergency room, and there he has this conversation with Bruce Willis' character. Now you know this is going to be a pivotal moment because the music is queuing, you know. It's building up, let's face it, it's getting really, really creepy. We're going to find out finally what's going on with this young kid. So imagine the music building and building and Cole says to his psychiatrist, "Do you want to know what my secret is?" Ooo yeh, go ahead do that, Ooo yeh!

The tension is building and then Cole says the line that the whole movie is known for, right, do you know what it is? He says, "I see dead people," and Bruce Willis isn't sure what that means so he asks him a follow-up question. "So, you see dead people in your dreams?" And Cole says, "No, when I am awake." "You mean, dead people like they're in their graves, they're in coffins?" And then Cole says something very, very profound, he says, "They're walking around like regular people. They don't see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don't know that they're dead." Hmm.

I've been a pastor now going on almost twenty-five years. You get to see a lot of things as a pastor and part of that movie stuck me so strongly, *"They only see what they want to see, and they don't know that they're dead"* because I've seen a lot of dead people in my days. I am not talking about at the funeral home or just before a funeral. I am talking about people who are spiritually dead, but they don't know they're dead.

I used to serve a congregation in West Chester County, New York, that's just north of New York City, about a half an hour before you get to the border with the Bronx. It was a very affluent community. We didn't have McMansions, we had houses that were bigger than McMansions, okay. You not only had the house, you had the estate, and occasionally we would be invited to parties because our kids went to the public school and we were invited to different parties and so we would go visit people and go to parties and get to talk with people and what was going on in their life. Now the people that were a part of that community had, most people would look on the outside and say everything is going great with them, they lived in the monster house, because everybody needs seventh-five hundred square feet with three kids, excuse me seventy-five hundred square feet with three people, you know. They had the money, they had the house, they had the bank account, but as I went and was listening in on the conversations that were happening, I realized that for so many of these folks their lives were a mess. Their marriages were unhappy. Some of them were talking about how they had to go get the Botox so that they could just prepare themselves for whoever might be the next wife down the road, so they always had to keep up because they were really concerned about that.

The kids would get like \$200 on a Friday so that they could get through the weekend. Why, because the parents weren't going to spend any time with them. So what do you think a rich kid with \$200 bucks in his pocket going to do on a Friday and Saturday night. And then they wonder gee, why are the kids the way they are? Why are they spoiled, or why are they suffering with addiction problems, or why do I have trouble helping them with their goals or whatever it might be? They cared more about just keeping up with their neighbors or with society, or whatever they did about keeping the faith. Now many of them knew I was a pastor so inevitably the conversation would somehow come to me and then they would try to justify kind of where they were in life. You know people are basically good, what they were saying was, I am basically good. And so many of them struggled with so many different issues.

The story that we have from the gospel from the evangelist Luke is a fantastic story that tells us a lot about human nature. It tells us about you and me. Jesus goes to a party that a Pharisee is going to have for him, it's a dinner, and in the middle of this dinner all of a sudden this woman comes in, Luke tells us that the woman is a known sinner, whatever that means. Right? Because her hair is down the assumption has always been that she might be someone, a woman that doesn't work at home. She has employment outside of the family unit, okay? Women always wore their hair up, or twisted or whatever and whenever it was down the only time you saw the hair down was with your spouse. So because her hair is down like that they are making the assumption of her other career choice. But this woman is pouring herself out, literally pouring herself out. Her tears are hitting Jesus' feet. She's wiping the tears with her hair. She's taken an alabaster jar, that's a nice little jar where it has a glass top, so it doesn't have a cork or anything like that, the only way to get the ointment out, because it has a shelf life, right, it has an expiration date, is, you break the jar itself, the little neck that it has, and then you can pour out the ointment. People would have this and it would be almost like a savings account, something precious that you have. It cost a lot of money. She breaks this and she pours it on Jesus, on his feet, and this Pharisee is looking at this, he seeing this happening and he is going, he's thinking to himself, I invited this

Rabbi over to have some nice theological conversation, and this is going on in my house. Surely if he was a prophet, if he was some sort of a super religious guy, he'd say to this woman, hey stop what you're doing and get out.

See, the Pharisee knows that she's a sinner, after all the job of the Pharisee is to know right from wrong. They kept all sixteen hundred thirteen laws of the Old Testament, they made sure that they went the straight and narrow and that everybody else that they knew was also doing that. So he's absolutely sure of who this woman is and what she is about.

Jesus senses this somehow. The Pharisee doesn't say it out loud, somehow Jesus senses what is going on here and he tells a story like he is often wont to do, he often tells stories, these parables. So he tells this story about a creditor and debtor and two people who owe the money and which one owed the most and wouldn't that show then that the person was most thankful who owed the most money, of course the Pharisee answers that correctly. But then Jesus speaks to his own hospitality that he experienced when he came in to Simon the Pharisee's house.

Now there were basic things that you did for people when you came into their home. This is a dusty acrid environment, everybody wears sandals, your feet get dirty and nasty, pretty much like it does in the summer if you're going barefoot and you're outside the whole time. If you go into somebody's house, the first thing they do is say here is a bowl of water, clean your feet. You offer some hospitality, basic hospitality so that they feel comfortable. You greet them with a hug or a kiss. Jesus says, son you didn't do any of that, and yet if he or she comes and she is crying and wiping my feet with her hair, anointing me, do you think she understands her need for forgiveness? What she does is so extravagant, it reminds me of something that Martin Luther said about being a sinner. "Be a sinner he said and sin boldly, but more boldly have faith and rejoice in Christ." And that's what she's doing.

You see this theme, Conversations with a Savior: A Sinner, but notice Jesus doesn't have a conversation with the woman except at the very end when he tells her she is forgiven. The conversation that he is actually having is with Simon. And Simon is so full of himself, he's so full of the judgement that he has toward the woman that he doesn't even see his own sin, his own lack of hospitality to a Savior who is in his midst. He doesn't even recognize Jesus for who he is. But Jesus recognizes Simon, he sees him as a sinner. He understands that he is dead in his sin. Simon just doesn't even know it. He only sees what he wants to see and he doesn't know that he is dead.

The woman on the other hand, she knows her situation. She knows where she stands before her Lord and so she falls down on her knees and she does these incredible acts of mercy and love and service for Jesus. She's come to Jesus for just this, forgiveness and healing and through over whelming hospitality she shows her tender care for him.

Simon's hospitality on the other hand, he doesn't do anything. He holds everything back, he doesn't recognize who or what Jesus is or appreciate what he is about, and he judges. He judges both the woman as well as Jesus, and he can't see the mercy of God standing right before him.

It is so easy for us brothers and sisters to be so wrapped and warped by our own sinfulness that we can't even see who we are or what it's doing to us. And yet, this sinful woman shows such a level of gratitude and thankfulness to Jesus that she then experiences forgiveness and compassion. She responds in mercy to Jesus because she has such a sense of Jesus' forgiveness and mercy to her and so she responds out of gratitude. That's what the forgiveness of God does for us. God's forgiveness already given to us by Jesus' death on the cross freely bestowed on you and me not because we deserve it but because Jesus wants to give it, and our response in those moments should be gratitude and thankfulness.

So what do you need in forgiveness? What sins burden you? What baggage do you carry around with you every single day? Come to Jesus. Give yourself to him in thankfulness and service.

The German mystic from the Middle Ages, Meister Eckhart said *"If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."* You are more than your sins. You are more than your past.

Paul said it so well, *"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."* And you and I, you and I who sometimes only see what we want to see, who don't know that we're dead are alive in Christ.

Amen

In the name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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