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God loved us first; he waits for us to acknowledge him

by Thomas Gumbleton
 The Peace Pulpit

Most of us, I'm sure, understand that the Gospel -- that word Gospel -- means "good news." Good news. And if we listen carefully to the Scriptures today, I think we'll understand why the Gospels mean "good news": extraordinary news, blessed news for all of us because this Gospel lesson and the other two Scriptures also remind us of how God has always first loved us. In the first letter of John, we read how God is love, and we're reminded that everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. This is love -- not that we loved God, but that God first loved us.

<p>God first loved us. God loved us by drawing us into being, loving us into existence, supporting us at every instant that we exist. It's all God's love -- God first loves us. That's the good news, and Jesus proclaims that good news because he has been steeped in it from his own understanding of the law and the prophets, especially the prophets. There's that beautiful passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah in Chapter 30, where the prophet has been urging the people not to enter into an alliance for war, but to go to war.</p> <p>This is in Chapter 30, and the prophet says, "Conversion into calmness would have been your salvation, and quietness and trust, your strength; but instead, you said, 'No. We will go on horses. Pray well then flee, and we will ride on rough, swift steeds,' you said. But then the war devastated in that war and experienced a terrible defeat. They had disobeyed the call of the prophet to conversion, to quietness, to calmness and peace, and trusting in God only.</p>	<p>Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Chapter 30, 2 Samuel 2:7-10, 13 Psalms 32:1-2, 5, 7, 11 Galatians 2:16, 19, 21 Luke 7:36-38 1 Peter 4:7-11</p>
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Then here's the beautiful words the prophet proclaims: "Yet God is waiting to be gracious to you. God is waiting to show you compassion. God is a God of love. Blessed are all who wait for God." What the prophet is proclaiming is this beautiful truth about God. God has first loved us; as we learn from the letter of John, God has loved us into being. Even when we fail God, fail to follow God's ways, God is always waiting to be gracious to us. That's what we learn from the first lesson today -- that incident in the life of

David, where he failed so dramatically -- caused the death of Uriah, one of his soldiers, arranged for him to be killed so he could take Uriah's wife, commit adultery -- terrible sins.

The prophet Nathan condemns David -- we're talking about in that first lesson -- and he makes David realize what a horrendous sin he has committed. David comes to see his failure and he proclaims his sorrow. "I have sinned against God," David cries out. The 51st psalm is the psalm that is attributed to David where he proclaims his sinfulness as he declares it here before God. Then Nathan says, "God has forgiven your sin. God has forgiven you. God has been waiting to be gracious to you," and so David is able to make some reparation and receive healing and forgiveness.

God was waiting to be gracious to him, and as soon as David acknowledged his sin, God's forgiveness overwhelms him, flows into his heart, his whole spirit. Isn't that what we learn, too, in today's Gospel lesson? Simon the Pharisee, in a way that is so arrogant, thinks Jesus doesn't know who this is who's touching him. For Simon, she's just a whore and a sinner. He doesn't know anything about her really, but knows that she's known as a sinner.

He can't understand how Jesus would allow himself to be touched by her, even to have his feet washed by her, have his feet kissed by her and perfumed with ointment, anointed with beautiful ointment. How can this be? Then Jesus tells that parable that we hear in today's Gospel, the parable about the two who had these debts, 500 silver pieces versus 50 silver pieces. Both are forgiven. Who's going to be the one that loves more? "Well of course," Simon says, "of course it'll be the one for whom more is forgiven."

Jesus says, "You're right." Jesus, in fact, says, "So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, hence she has shown great love." See, God was waiting to be gracious to her. God forgives her, overwhelms her with love when she acknowledges her sinfulness; she comes to be healed of that sin. Her sins have been forgiven, and that's attested by the great love she shows toward Jesus. Her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she is shown great love.

That's the same theme that we find in our second lesson today, Paul's letter to the church of Galatia, where Paul talks about God's loving action in his life: "Insofar as I now live in the flesh, I'm still here on earth; I live by faith, by relationship with the son of God who has loved me." He comes to know Jesus "as God who has loved me, overwhelmed me with the love Jesus pours forth" upon Paul and upon all of us.

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"I live by faith in the son of God who has loved me, poured forth his love for me on the cross," and that is the faith that brings about this grateful response from Paul and changes his whole life. He gives up his former life and follows Jesus, the one who has been waiting to be gracious to him -- Jesus, the son of God, the one who's overwhelmed him with love -- and now Paul responds, and his life is given over to Jesus and to the way of Jesus.

We hear that good news today: God's love is always there. God is waiting to be gracious to all of us, to forgive whatever sin we've ever committed, as long as we are ready to acknowledge it, ready to be healed, ready to repair what we've done. God's love is there; God's love fills us. God's love transforms us, and then we are capable of reaching out in love to one another in our everyday lives. In everything that we do, we become those who are known because of their love for one another -- followers of Jesus.

This morning, then, I hope as we celebrate this Eucharist, each of us will perhaps recall where we need to be healed and forgiven. Acknowledge our failures and then experience this love that God is waiting to

pour forth upon us, and then leave this church, go back out into our everyday life, and spread that love.

Live that love by loving one another in our daily life, in our family, in our city, in our country, in our world, that we will be those who bring that love of God that has been poured forth upon us into the world in which we live and help to transform that world into the reign of God, where every person will begin to experience deeply the peace and the healing and the love that God is offering to us and to our world.

[Homily given at St. Anne, Frankfort, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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