

Simon Says or Savior Says

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who can even forgive your sins, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

How many of you have played the children's game of Simon says either as an adult or in your youth? (SLIDE) I used to love that game as a kid. I used to wonder why it was Simon Says and not Mommie Says or Billy says or my personal favorite, Mel Says... Today our Gospel from Luke tells the story of a different kind of Simon Says. Luke offers us either Simon Says or Savior Says. Which game will you choose? We meet the real Simon in our Gospel lesson. This Simon was probably not the one Simon Says was named after, but rather he was a Pharisee – a religious leader who thought the way to heaven was by keeping God's laws. (SLIDE) Jesus disagreed with Simon. He said salvation comes to us through faith in his works not our works. That's the big, beautiful difference between Simon Says and Savior Says.

Our text describes how Simon invited Jesus to his house for dinner. When Jesus arrived, however, it became clear Simon didn't think very highly of him. The normal courtesies - the greeting kiss and water to wash the feet - were not offered Jesus. (SLIDE) Picture the father who refuses to shake the hand of his daughter's boyfriend and fails to offer to take his coat when he comes over for dinner. So why did Simon invite Jesus if he didn't like him? Apparently, he wanted to observe Jesus more closely. (SLIDE) Many were saying Jesus was a

Simon Says or Savior Says

great prophet, perhaps even the promised Messiah. Simon dismissed those ideas when a woman with a sinful reputation came up to where Jesus was reclining at the banquet table and began crying. She cried so much her tears began to wet Jesus' feet. She then let down her hair and wiped Jesus' feet dry with it. Finally, she kissed his feet and poured expensive perfume on them! (SLIDE) You can almost see the look of disdain as Simon watched and thought to himself: "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." The fact that Jesus didn't shun this sinful woman, shows the game of Savior Says plays by a different set of rules than the rules Simon was following. Simon thought the Messiah would only welcome those who lived according to God's commands, as Simon himself thought he had done.

Jesus set Simon straight... Knowing what Simon was thinking, Jesus said, Hey Simon, let me tell you a story... Like the two men in the parable, the woman and Simon owed a debt incurred by their sin neither could repay to God. Simon may not have been guilty of the same type of public sin the woman had committed, but he could hardly say he was without sin. The writer of the letters from John reminds us that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. So, Simon was at least guilty of the sin of looking down on others. How many times in a day are we guilty of labeling people as Simon did? (SLIDE) I notice a man whose shirt is

Simon Says or Savior Says

untucked, face unshaven and I think, “What a slob.” What I may not know is that he was up all night with a sick a child.

The thought came to me as I read this story over several times this week, Why is Jesus even bothering to associate with either one of these sinners, Simon or the sinful woman? I found an interesting analogy. (SLIDE) Suppose you were swimming in the ocean and got caught up in the rip current and needed a lifeguard. The first lifeguard sees you struggling through his binoculars. He gets out his megaphone and starts shouting directions at you to swim faster. (SLIDE) Come on, stroke harder, he calls. Keep your head up. Swim faster! He shouts. The whole time you are being swept out further and further. Finally, a second lifeguard sees your predicament. Instead of barking commands from the shore, this savior jumps into the water and drags you to the safety of the shore. Which lifeguard do you prefer? The one who tells you to try harder or the one who actually runs into the water to rescue you? I'll take the later, thank you very much! I can't achieve salvation by my own efforts, no matter how much coaching, admonishing, or shaming. My own efforts will never overcome the rip currents of my sin and neither can yours. On the other hand, we have a savior who jumped down here into this thing we call life in order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

Simon Says or Savior Says

Now if you're an astute reader and pay attention to the details of this story, you might be asking yourself a very good question. If salvation depends on Jesus alone, why does Jesus say to the woman only after her acts of love and devotion that her sins, which were many, have been forgiven? The misunderstanding comes from a language difference between the ancient Greek of our text and our modern English. The verb Jesus used when he told the woman her sins had been forgiven was in the Greek "Perfect" tense. English doesn't have a perfect tense. The perfect tense of a verb refers to an action that happened in the past, but has ongoing effects into the present and even into the future. In English Jesus says to her, "Your sins are forgiven." In the original Greek it would be more like, "Your sins have been forgiven and they are still being forgiven and they will always and forever be forgiven." Her forgiveness happened before our story took place and was still happening during their dinner party and she continued to be forgiven as long as she had the breath of life. Her tears and anointing of Jesus were her responses to the forgiveness she had already and was still receiving. I think it works something like this... When you see smoke on the horizon you ask, "What's burning?" (SLIDE) The smoke isn't the cause of the fire, it's the evidence that there is a fire. Just like the smoke, the woman's love for Jesus is evidence of her great forgiveness. In other words, her love for Jesus wasn't the price of his forgiveness, it was the proof that she was in fact forgiven.

Simon Says or Savior Says

That leads us into yet another conundrum. Jesus tells her, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” If it was her faith that saved her, then what is faith? Once again, in the Greek language, there’s one word we get translated in English as either faith, belief, trust, or hope. In Greek, all those words are equivalent in meaning. It was her trust in the power of Jesus to forgive that saved her. Here’s the difference between this sinful woman and Simon the Pharisee. Suppose Simon and this sinful woman are both on the same sinking ship in the middle of the ocean. (SLIDE) The woman believes and trusts her life vest will save her, while Simon thinks he needs no life vest and he will be able to swim under his own power all the way to shore.

Our own efforts and good works will never earn our way to heaven, but they are like the beautiful rays of sunshine that come from a forgiven heart. (SLIDE) That’s the purest kind of love we humans are capable of. We’re kind and loving to others because it just comes naturally from a heart that knows the love and forgiveness of God. Without that forgiven heart, all our good and kind deeds can only come from a prideful arrogant heart that only knows how to satisfy the desires of the flesh and Saint Paul might say. So, which game are you in? Are you still playing Simon says or can you, on a good day, put down your need to work out your own salvation, and pick up the mantle of faith and play Savior Says?

Simon Says or Savior Says

May you experience the love and forgiveness of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Once we've known the love and forgiveness Jesus earned for us, may we offer that same love and forgiveness to those who have never known the love and grace of Jesus. Let's pray... Lord, because we have been forgiven much, help us to now love much. In Jesus' name, amen.