

Pentecost C4  
June 12, 2016  
“Roundabout”

Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair  
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**Luke 7:36 - 8:3**

<sup>36</sup>One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. <sup>37</sup>And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. <sup>38</sup>She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. <sup>39</sup>Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.” <sup>40</sup>Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “Speak.” <sup>41</sup>“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup>When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” <sup>43</sup>Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” <sup>44</sup>Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. <sup>45</sup>You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup>You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup>Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” <sup>48</sup>**Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”** <sup>49</sup>**But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”** <sup>50</sup>And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

8Soon afterwards **he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>as well as some women** who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

**Galatians 2:11-21**

<sup>11</sup>*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; <sup>12</sup>for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. <sup>13</sup>And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup>But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”* <sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. <sup>17</sup>But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup>But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. <sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; <sup>20</sup>and **it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

My children and I once visited friends in London, friends who had been members of our church in Michigan. These friends and their children had worshipped and served with us for two years and we became close. So when their employer sent them back home to London they invited us to come visit and promised to show us around. We saw some incredible things there, but one experience stands out.

Our friends were driving us into the city on a brand new highway. And at one point the highway suddenly dipped below ground level in order to go under an apartment building. It was a big building and we were under it for a minute or so and then just as suddenly on the other side of the building the road came up to the surface again. And that’s when we saw it.

Ahead of us was a huge roundabout- one of those circular intersections where you go around until you find your proper exit and you peel off onto a new road. Well, in the middle of that huge roundabout there was an island, and on that island there were about 25 flashing stoplights on 25 poles. Some were flashing green and others yellow and still others red, all at the same time. They were facing in every direction.

We were confused. Which of these 25 stoplights was ours? Should we be going or stopping? How could we figure it out? We were all yelling directions at the same time as we entered into the roundabout. Now we also had to look for the proper exit, and there quite a few to choose from. There were several lanes in the roundabout and we moved in to an inner lane. What road were we looking for? And what was going on with those flashing stoplights? Oops, the exit just went past. We'll have to go around again.

By this time we realized the traffic lights on the island we were now going around at high speed were not traffic lights at all. They were actually an art installation composed of traffic lights and not what we assumed them to be. When we recognized this we started to laugh. We laughed so hard we began to cry. And we missed our exit again. So we went around one more time and finally found our way into the city.

Jesus was visiting friends for dinner. These were important people from the community, people who knew they were important. And they were holy. At least they thought they were. They said the right things, did the right things, believed the right things...then a woman came into the dinner who was not any of these things. She was not important, not holy like them, in fact she was despised, and the party came to a halt. Everyone watched as she went over to Jesus and, well, what would you call it? Worshipped him? Revered him? Loved him?

The whispers were loud and accusatory. Why would Jesus let her touch him like that? Maybe Jesus isn't as holy as he says he is. And then Jesus dismissed her, saying, "Your sins are forgiven." Who does Jesus think he is, forgiving someone's sins?

Don't we all miss the point? Don't we all miss what Jesus is up to because we assume he's doing what we think he should be doing instead of seeing what he's really up to? Paul had the same experience with his friends in Galatia. They were stuck on a roundabout that was taking them in a circle. They saw the exit to Jesus coming by but they couldn't take it.

Today we are recognizing all the teachers in our congregation. Their job is to share Jesus with us in the nursery and Sunday School and Bible studies and youth group so we all can get out of our roundabouts and onto the road that leads to a life in Jesus. Today we especially recognize our confirmation and commissioning class students who have said they want to be on that road, too.

Today you (confirmation class) publicly declare your intention to live in a way that is different from many of the other kids you know at school or on your soccer team or who live on your street. The same old ways of thinking, the same old ways of seeing can be changed.

Look at the rest of the story with Jesus. The people at the dinner party were caught up in a roundabout, going in circles – treating themselves well and others poorly like they had always done. But at that party they saw Jesus love the way God wants us to love and be loved.

You may have heard some nasty debates in recent weeks about Mexicans and Muslims and women. I have been shocked and disappointed with what I've heard and seen. God has claimed you in your baptism and Jesus has forgiven your sins so you can be different, so you can love your neighbor, welcome your neighbor, give dignity to your neighbor whether anyone else does so or not.

Paul said to his church, "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." Today we celebrate that you have welcomed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. He lives in you. You see through his eyes, you dare to love with his heart. You become a member of this community that is devoted to being more and more like Jesus together.

When Jesus left that party where he had forgiven and loved that woman whom everyone else had rejected, when he left that party he went on down the road with his group of men and women disciples. You are not meant to be a Christian on your own. I will say you can't be a Christian on your own, because Jesus calls us together to go down the road with him, to serve the world around us. We can't do it alone. We won't do it alone. We need each other if we're going to love that way, serve that way, stand up to bullies and oppressors the way he did.

These are your brothers and sisters in Christ. These are the ones going down the road together with Jesus who are giving their lives for the sake of this community around us. We are not going around the roundabout, we are looking to follow Jesus down the next road he is taking here in Montclair and in our neighborhoods.

Welcome to the family, welcome to the ministry.