

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Enjoying a Debt Free Life

Luke 7:36-50

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,³⁸ and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said 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."⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.⁴¹ "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

If you've attended one of our Financial Peace Universities or if you listen to Dave Ramsey on the radio, you know he really emphasizes the importance of paying of all your debt. He says that you are not able to have financial peace with a load of debt hanging over your head. That's sound financial advice. But we're not here to talk finances today. We're here to talk about a different kind of debt. In our Gospel today, Jesus uses the picture of financial debt to speak about the spiritual topic of forgiveness. As we sit at the dinner table with Jesus this morning, we see that he has a lot to speak to our hearts about the joy of a debt free life.

The dinner, which Jesus is attending, is at the house of a Pharisee. We know that this Pharisee invited Jesus to the dinner, although we don't know his motives in doing so. Since Pharisees commonly saw themselves as enemies of Jesus, this dinner might have been an opportunity for this Pharisee to observe Jesus and perhaps test him in one way or another. If that is what this Pharisee wanted, he got his wish, although probably not in the way he was planning. Somehow, a woman made her way into the Pharisee's house. The only background we have on this woman, according to the account, is the fact that she lived a sinful life in town. Most likely, this is a reference to her being a known prostitute. This is not someone the Pharisee would have invited to his party on his own.

As we look at the woman's actions, however, we learn more about her. She was not merely a sinner. She was a repentant sinner who put her faith in Jesus. She showed this first by seeking Jesus out when she

heard where he was eating. She showed her repentant attitude by the tears that she shed. She was not proud of her sinful lifestyle. She knew that she was a sinful woman. She knew that she did not belong in the presence of Jesus, the Holy One. She also knew that Jesus had forgiven her sins. That is why she wept. She wept out of gratitude for the undeserved love that Jesus showed her. She wept so much that her tears fell on Jesus feet and made them wet. She then wiped his feet with her hair and kissed them. Again, this is a sign of her love for Jesus. Finally, she anointed his feet with a fine perfume.

All of these actions seemed unacceptable to the Pharisee. We get a glimpse into what he thinks about the situation when Luke records, *“he said 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 implication here is that if Jesus knew what kind of woman this was, he wouldn’t let her come that close to him, but would rather send her away. Of course, the Pharisee was completely missing the point. Jesus knew precisely what kind of woman this was. He also knew that he had come into this world to love and forgive sinners, such as her. He would never think of sending her away.

Jesus wanted to bring the Pharisee to this understanding so he told him a short parable. He said, *“Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”* The Pharisee correctly responded that the one who had the larger debt would love him more. Jesus then pointed out the Pharisee’s hypocrisy by adding, *“Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”*

No doubt, the Pharisee would have considered himself a better person and a more pious follower of the Lord than this woman. Jesus, however, points out that the opposite is true. This woman showed herself to be a true servant of Jesus by her actions. And why did she show Jesus so much love? She did so because she had experienced so much forgiveness. That’s not what the Pharisee would have wanted. He would have wanted to limit God’s love and forgiveness to only those people he deemed worthy. He needed to know that God’s love was for all.

It’s easy for us to come down hard on the Pharisee and call him a self-righteous hypocrite. Sadly, however, we have to admit that there is a little bit of this Pharisee in every one of us. The Pharisee in us comes out when we try to limit the scope of God’s forgiveness based on the type of sin someone commits or the type of person we think them to be. We are tempted to think that someone isn’t worthy of God’s forgiveness because they committed a sin we find particularly offensive—perhaps they have committed adultery or had an abortion or stole something from us or spoke cruel and hate-filled words. It’s one thing if someone goes on blatantly defying God’s law and does not show repentance. But if their sin is followed by a repentant heart, such as the woman’s in our reading, who are we to think they should not be forgiven?

The fact of the matter is: if God’s love and forgiveness were limited to only those people who proved themselves worthy of it, we would all be on the outside looking in. Who of us can say that we are any better than the woman in our reading? Every one of us has committed hideous sins in the view of God’s law. Not one of us can stand before God as someone deserving of his love. That is what makes this

account in Luke's gospel so wonderful. True, we do need to come to grips with our hypocrisy and identify with that Pharisee, but we also need to experience God's unconditional love as we identify with the sinful woman in the story. We need to hear the same words from Jesus that she heard. And what are those words that Jesus spoke to her? He said, "*Your sins are forgiven.*"

The other guests at the party doubted Jesus' authority to speak those words. They scoffed, "*Who is this who even forgives sins?*" They might have thought to themselves, "Only God can forgive sins." Little did they realize that they were looking at God himself in the person of Jesus Christ. If anyone has the right to say, "Your sins are forgiven" it is Jesus. He earned that right when he earned the world's forgiveness. He did that by living a perfect life and then suffering and dying for the sins of the world. Jesus can speak forgiveness because he knows personally that those sins have been paid for. He still has the nail marks to prove it. By faith in Jesus as her Savior, the sinful woman could be certain that her sins were forgiven. That is why Jesus said to her, "*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.*"

Just like that sinful woman, each of us needs to hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven." He says that to us in his Word. He says that to us through his messengers, through pastors and fellow Christians. He speaks that forgiveness to us in a very special way in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. There is no way you can leave the altar after receiving the body and blood of your Savior without hearing the words from Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven." This simple message is spoken in the gospel to you again and again. And why does Jesus tell you that you are forgiven in many different ways and at many different times? It is because you need to hear it often. Just as I do. Every day we are sinful. Every day we need to hear that we are forgiven. We need to know that Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross covers our sins.

And then how do we respond? The woman in the reading showed her gratefulness in the way she anointed Jesus feet. We also have an opportunity to show our gratefulness for the forgiveness Jesus gives to us. We do this when we worship him. We do this when we, in turn, speak his forgiveness to others. What a joy it is to hear that our sins are forgiven. What a joy it is to know that our Savior's love and forgiveness has no limits. **Amen.**

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Pastor Steven Hahm
pastor@crossofglorylutheran.com