

Your Sins Are Forgiven
Luke 7:36-8:3
June 12, 2016

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 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 wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

During his ministry, here on earth, Jesus performed many miracles. He calmed a raging sea. He healed all kinds of diseases and afflictions. He even raised the dead. Which of his miracles do you think was the hardest for him to do? The hardest, the most costly, miracle Jesus ever performed was to speak the four words of today's sermon title – "Your sins are forgiven."

Of all the miracles Jesus performed, forgiving sins was the one which demanded the most. Jesus could do all the other miracles with just a word. To forgive sins, cost him his life.

Today's Gospel reading is all about forgiveness – how to be forgiven, how not to be forgiven, and the end results of forgiveness. As we walk through today's text, we will learn about all three.

The text opens with a dinner invitation from a Pharisee. Pharisees were a sect of Jews who believed that salvation depended on the performance of enough good works. Pharisees cared more about the rules they had dreamed up than they cared about

loving God.

We don't know who this Pharisee was. We only know his name was Simon. We don't know why he invited Jesus to dinner. What we know is that Jesus knew that Pharisees needed him as much as anyone else needed him. We know that Jesus loved the Pharisee. We know those things because Jesus accepted the invitation.

It might help us later on to understand how a dinner took place in those days. People didn't sit on chairs at a table. Instead, they reclined on couches, with their feet pointed away from the table. That explains how the woman in the story was able to reach Jesus' feet without crawling under a table.

Furthermore, in those days, a house was used mainly for storage and sleeping. A dinner party would be held on a type of patio. That explains how the woman was able to gain access to a dinner she wasn't invited to.

The text tells us this woman had led a sinful life. We don't know what her sin was and it doesn't matter. She might have been a prostitute, the town drunk, a shoplifter, or just someone who liked to party a little too much. We also get the impression that her lifestyle was known throughout the town.

The woman's actions were strange and surprising. She made her appearance carrying an alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. That means this woman didn't just show up on a whim. She came prepared to carry out a plan. She knew what she was going to do.

Standing behind Jesus, at his feet, was an act of submission. Her silence in the presence of a rabbi was also an act of submission. She began to cry and used her tears to wet Jesus' feet. She wiped his feet with her hair. She kissed his feet.

We might find these things somewhat repulsive, but think about the depth of the love it took to bring her to do such things. There was no doubt in her mind who she was and who Jesus was.

Next, she poured the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. This woman's sacrifice involved her pride, her time, her labor, and her wealth. She held nothing back from Jesus. She gave to Jesus from everything that was hers.

Just as Jesus showed love to the Pharisee by accepting his dinner invitation, he now shows love for this known sinner by accepting her offerings.

Now, Simon the Pharisee reenters the story – not to praise Jesus for his love and acceptance of this woman, but to condemn Jesus. Simon concludes: *If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.* (Lk 7:39 ESV). True to his hypocritical, Pharisee beliefs, Simon considers himself

better than this woman with a reputation and mentally condemns Jesus for not feeling the same way.

To this point in the story, all of these things have taken place in silence. The woman performs her acts of love and Simon judges Jesus' behavior all without a word being spoken. Jesus is the first to break the silence.

Simon, I have something to say to you (Lk 7:40 ESV). Simon answers in a rather disdainful way: *Say it, teacher* (Lk 7:40 ESV). By addressing Jesus simply as "teacher" and not as "Lord," Simon was devaluing who Jesus truly was.

Jesus tells this parable: *A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?* (Lk 7:41-42 ESV).

This is a real no-brainer. Simon can't escape giving Jesus the answer he wants. However, Simon suspects a trap has been laid and begins his answer with, *I suppose...* That's the equivalent of saying, "This is what I presume you want me to say." But Jesus wasn't trying to be tricky. He puts the truth squarely in Simon's face.

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 wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." (Lk 7:44-47 ESV).

Jesus makes his point by comparing the actions of the woman to the inactions of Simon. Simon didn't even offer Jesus the customary courtesies of the day. What Simon failed to do, this woman had done with all her heart in her own way.

This woman with a bad reputation had loved much because she had been forgiven much. Simon loved little because, as a good Pharisee, he didn't think he had anything to be forgiven.

It is important to remember that this woman was not forgiven because of the things she had done for Jesus. That is the way a Pharisee thinks – forgiveness follows good works. That's the preaching of many churches today. But good works will never bring forgiveness. Our condition is so lost that, according to the prophet Isaiah, any good works we do on our own to impress God are nothing but *filthy rags* (Is 6:6).

The things this woman did, proceeded from a heart of love. The love in her heart was the result of her appreciation of her forgiveness. The forgiveness she received came from her faith in Jesus to be, not just a rabbi, but the one and only Son of God.

That is the reverse order in which things happen. The proper order is; faith in the Savior brings the forgiveness of sins; forgiveness of sins fills the heart with love of God; love of God overflows into actions that show God's love.

In the end, Jesus performs the most difficult miracle of all. Jesus tells the woman, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Lk 7:48 ESV). The guests at the dinner quietly object among themselves that Jesus doesn't have the right to forgive sins, but that doesn't have an effect on Jesus or the woman. What the world thinks never changes the things of God.

Jesus' final words to the woman can be of great comfort to all Christians. He tells her: "*Your faith has saved you; go in peace.*" (Lk 7:50 ESV). What a great comfort to know that your salvation is not based on how well you keep a certain set of rules. Your salvation is not based on how good other people think you are. Your salvation is not based on how good you think you are. Your salvation is based on your faith, and God is the only judge of your faith.