

## Luke 7:36-50

<sup>36</sup>A certain one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him. Jesus entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup>Just then a sinful woman from that town learned that he was reclining in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume, <sup>38</sup>stood behind him near his feet weeping, and began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she began to wipe them with her hair while also kissing his feet and anointing them with the perfume. <sup>39</sup>When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would realize who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, because she is a sinner."

<sup>40</sup>Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

He said, "Teacher, say it."

<sup>41</sup>"A certain moneylender had two debtors. The one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup>When they could not pay, he forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?"

<sup>43</sup>Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the larger debt forgiven."

Then he told him, "You have judged correctly." <sup>44</sup>Turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, but you did not give me water for my feet. Yet she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup>You did not give me a kiss, but she, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup>You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup>Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little." <sup>48</sup>Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven."

<sup>49</sup>Those reclining at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

<sup>50</sup>He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

## Giving Thanks

### I.

Simon the Pharisee was a moral upright kind of person. He was someone that everyone wanted to be around. He knew how society functioned. He was intimately acquainted with every protocol imaginable for interacting with all sorts of different people; he knew exactly how to behave in every circumstance.

There were no skeletons in Simon's closet. There were no seedy stories about his personal life. If he were to apply for a loan for his Mediterranean vacation home, his credit score would be found impeccable. As a card-carrying member of the Pharisees, his card was marked: "Pharisee in Good Standing."

It was this Simon—this fine, upstanding Pharisee—who invited Jesus and some of "his people" to dinner. The invitation was proof of what a wonderful fellow Simon was. Though there had been bad blood between Jesus and the Pharisees, this olive branch would prove there were no hard feelings. It was quite a generous offer, he thought. Jesus' reputation would be enhanced by dining at the home of Simon.

Jesus arrives. He didn't come in a stretch limo. The dusty trails would have left a fine coating of dust all over his SUV, if he had one. Jesus arrived at Simon's house walking on his own two feet. No matter how cautious a traveler was, walking along the roads would leave you covered in dust, especially your feet.

No wonder it was customary to provide guests a bowl of water to wash off the residue of the dusty trail. It may not sound very refreshing to us, but a little oil was offered to put on the head, too. As many cultures do, even today, guests were greeted with a kiss.

These things were all matters of common courtesy. Everyone knew that this is what one did when welcoming guests. Steeped in culture as he was, Simon knew it, too. But *he* thought he was greeting an inferior. He greeted Jesus as "teacher" instead of the more honorable "Lord" that would have been used to greet a guest of honor.

Simon didn't think *he* needed Jesus. He though *Jesus* needed *him*.

## II.

"Jesus entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table" (Luke 7:36, EHV). In those days, one didn't sit on a chair at the table, but reclined on dining couches. The heads of the guests were toward the table with their feet stuck out behind them.

"Just then a sinful woman from that town learned that he was reclining in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume, <sup>38</sup>stood behind him near his feet weeping, and began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she began to wipe them with her hair while also kissing his feet and anointing them with the perfume" (Luke 7:37-38, EHV). A woman snuck in to the dinner party. Her every treatment of Jesus was deferential—quite a contrast to the host. A kiss on the cheek would have been a typical greeting; she didn't feel worthy, so she kissed his feet instead.

Instead of using water to wash his feet, she cried over them. It makes me think of the passage: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news of peace, who preach the gospel of good things!" (Romans 10:15, EHV). She understood that he was the One bringing the good news that God had remembered all his promises to his people. A woman's hair was her pride and glory, typically kept wrapped up; she wouldn't display it for just anyone. She considered Jesus with such reverence and respect that she let her hair down and wiped his feet dry with it.

Jesus was far too special in her eyes to use common oil to anoint his head. She used an expensive jar of perfume, instead. In fact, she anointed his feet with the perfume. Jesus' feet were far more valuable than anyone else's head would be. He deserved the very best. She understood that.

## III.

Jesus said nothing as this woman performed her acts of love. He just sat there. Simon seethed inside. "When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would realize who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, because she is a sinner'" (Luke 7:39, EHV). His mind raced at how this dirty, rotten scum had invaded his party. Everyone knew this woman was a sinner. Jesus obviously couldn't be much of a prophet if he couldn't even recognize this woman for what she was.

"Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you'" (Luke 7:40, EHV). How could Jesus answer when Simon hadn't even spoken aloud?

Jesus told the parable of the two debtors. Each owed a lender some money; one owed much more than the other. If the lender were to cancel both debts, which one would be more grateful?

Simon's mind raced again. Was this some sort of trick question? Voice dripping with sarcasm, he replied: "I suppose the one who had the larger debt forgiven" (Luke 7:43, EHV).

After recounting the differences of host and sinner in their treatment of him, Jesus says: "Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47, EHV). Jesus had cancelled her debt. The sinful woman recognized him as that One promised by God. She wanted to demonstrate to him her thanks.

## IV.

"Her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much." Look carefully at the word order of what Jesus says. She didn't love Jesus to try and *get* his forgiveness; she loved because she recognized that Jesus had forgiven her.

"The one who is forgiven little loves little." Are you more like Simon, or the woman? Do you need a lot of forgiveness, or just a little bit. Or perhaps, none at all.

It's easy to sometimes act like Simon the Pharisee. It's easy to notice all the sins of others, never looking in the mirror of God's Law and seeing your own sins.

If you have explored your copy of the new hymnal, you will find that right after all the services in the front of the hymnal, and after the Athanasian Creed, starting on page 286, is Luther's Catechism. No, not all the questions and answers that are in your catechism book with all the

passages that show how Luther got to the meanings he wrote. All the six chief parts of Christian doctrine you had to learn and recite in Catechism class are in there, though.

Read through the commandments and their meanings. You will quickly realize that every single one of those Commandments is violated by you in thought, word, or action every day. With careful consideration of your own faults, you will find that you fit into the category of the woman rather than Simon.

The woman *knew* she needed lots of forgiveness. Every day I look in the mirror of God's Law and see that *I* need lots of forgiveness, too. Looking carefully at Simon, you will find that he *thought* he was pure, but it was just so much whitewash covering the evil inside his heart.

There is a funny thing about debt. Most people don't set out to get tens of thousands of dollars in debt—it just happens over time. Little by little the debt builds up until one day you go to get a new loan, and your credit score is horrible.

That was the condition Simon was in. His sins were insignificant in his own eyes. Though he didn't know it, his debt of sin was adding up in God's eyes. Already spiritually bankrupt, his debt mounted higher and higher. He had just as much need to grovel at the feet of Jesus as did the so-called "sinful" woman.

We, too, are spiritually bankrupt. Whether we are like the woman and know it, or like Simon who was oblivious to his problems, it doesn't change the fact that sin separates us from God. We desperately *need* the Lord Jesus.

That's what Thanksgiving is really all about. While we might be thankful for the things we have and the people that surround us at the holidays and so much food that we might go into a food coma tomorrow, the real thing we are thankful for is the forgiveness Jesus has won for us and freely gives to us. Showered with that forgiveness, our tears wet down his feet and our kisses show our gratitude. Love for him fills us to overflowing.

V.

It happens for the same reason the woman loved Jesus so much. "Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47, EHV). Our love is the result of Jesus' forgiveness, not the cause of him forgiving us.

His love is vividly displayed each year in the Lenten season when we read his Passion History during the weeks that lead up to Easter. During that week, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples (John 13:3-5), showing that as the Messiah, he had come to be *our* servant. It wasn't just our feet that needed cleansing, but our whole bodies. He came to purify us from all the hurtful words that come out of our mouths, the hatred that lurks just beneath the surface, the lack of love we show to others we care about. He came to deal with hearts that were dead in trespasses and sins.

Simon *thought* he was as clean and pure as newly-fallen snow, but he, too, was dead in his sins. Jesus did not *need* to be cleansed, because he really was clean.

At Calvary's cross a nail was driven through those feet that had been wiped clean with the tears and hair of this woman. The beautiful feet which bring the good news of salvation were pierced so that we could be washed clean from all our sins.

He still meets with us to wash our sins away. In the worship service, the pastor stands in for Christ and announces the absolution of sins which Jesus has already purchased and won. Jesus' love for us is so vast and so high and so deep that we won't completely understand it until we see him face-to-face.

Though our understanding is imperfect, we meet here this evening for our special Thanksgiving celebration to give him thanks for all he has done for us, especially making us his own sons and daughters by faith in him. Amen.