

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost; July 3, 2022  
+ Luke 7:36-50 +  
“Forgiven Much, Love Much”

A certain one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him. Jesus entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. Just then a sinful woman from that town learned that he was reclining at the Pharisee’s house. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume, stood behind him near his feet weeping, and began to wipe his feet with her tears. Then she began to wipe them with her hair while also kissing his feet and anointing them with perfume. 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.”

Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

He said, “Teacher, say it.”

“A certain moneylender had two debtors. The one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?”

Simon answered, “I suppose the one who had the larger debt forgiven.”

Then he told him, “You have judged correctly.” 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. You did not give me a kiss, but she, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. 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.” Then Jesus told her, “Your sins have been forgiven.”

Those reclining at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

It seems like such a nice gesture: a Pharisee named Simon invites Jesus to come to his house and dine. It seems like a nice gesture. But why? Why does Simon have Jesus to his home?

Jesus will tell us that Simon does not give him water for his feet, which is a minimal gesture of hospitality. Nor does Simon kiss Jesus, another common and easy show of friendship. So, it appears Simon’s reason for having Jesus over is not to be his friend. He gives Jesus nothing good.

Actually, the only thing Simon does give Jesus is unfair judgment. When he sees a woman with a reputation for sin touching Jesus, weeping over him and anointing him with oil, Simon pounces: **“If this man were a prophet, he would realize who is touching him and what kind of a woman she is, because she is a sinner.”** He gives Jesus nothing but judgment.

Nor is Simon interested in receiving anything from Jesus. It is still early in Jesus’ ministry. It seems the Pharisees and other religious figures are still sizing him up and deciding what to make of this supposed prophet. Simon has already judged that Jesus can’t be a real prophet because he associates with someone known for her sinful life. And so Simon will not receive teaching from Jesus. And, he will not take Jesus’ forgiveness, either.

Pharisee that he is, Simon doesn't operate under divine forgiveness. He works for God's favor. That's his system. So he will not take Jesus' grace.

I am not a Pharisee like Simon. Neither are you, and I will not speak to myself or any other Christian as though we are. But when I see Jesus treated the way Simon the Pharisee treats him, I must examine my own heart and my own life, and ask: do I ever treat Jesus this way? Do you?

Are there times in my life when I want Jesus around, but don't want to give him anything? I want my cross on the wall, my name in the church directory, Jesus in my vicinity. But how much will I give him? How far out of my way will go to serve him? Do I ever, like Simon, neglect even the most basic gestures of friendship and love, even a short prayer, a subtle witness, or small act of kindness to my neighbor? I am no Pharisee, and neither are you. But there are times that we, too, want Jesus in the area of our lives without giving him a thing.

Except, maybe, our unfair judgment. Simon sees Jesus interacting with a sinful woman and sneers in judgment. Do I ever look at what Jesus is doing and dare to judge him? Jesus, if you're running this world, you're making a fine mess of things. You can do anything, and this is how things look? Jesus, what are you doing? And Jesus, I know you're into grace and forgiveness and all that. But look, there are some people – and I won't name names – but we all know there are some people who are just too far gone. Some people, Jesus, not even you should touch.

And, like Simon, there are times that I care little for what Jesus has to offer me. Because I've done no real harm to anyone today. Because my careless words haven't ruined anyone or anything. Because my laziness hasn't cost too much. Compared to those other people – you know, the ones Jesus shouldn't touch – I'm solid.

I'm not a Pharisee. Neither are you. We are Jesus' people. But the Pharisaical slice of our hearts remains in place until we meet Jesus face to face. In our own lives, the spirit of Simon lurks around. To want Jesus, but not too close. To judge him, especially his grace to the worst of sinners. To fold our arms at his grace for ourselves.

And so, when Jesus calls Simon by name and asks him a question, maybe we could each insert our own names in the slot: **"Simon, I have something to tell you." He said, "Teacher, say it." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. The one owed him five hundred denarii (ballpark \$75,000), and the other fifty (about \$7,500). When they could not pay, he forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?"**

In Jesus' little story, there are two things we need to see right away. First: both people owe. One owes a lot, one owes a little. But they both owe. Everyone owes God for their sins. Maybe you haven't done as much dirt as the people around you. But God does not command us: "Live a life that looks better than your neighbors." No, he commands us: **"Be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy."** Everyone owes God; and no one can ever pay him off. **"They could not pay."** No one can pay.

But here's the second thing: they were both forgiven. Not only does everyone owe God the perfection they cannot supply, but everyone is forgiven. We are forgiven because Jesus paid what we owe. With his perfect life, Jesus supplies perfection to us. With his death on the cross, Jesus pays what we owe for our sin. With his resurrection, Jesus guarantees that this forgiving work is real. **"He forgave them both."**

Everyone owes; Jesus forgives everyone's debt. But now Jesus asks a question which, to Simon, must have seemed rather condescending: **"So, which of them will love him more?"** Can you see Simon blink away at that question. It's so obvious! **Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the larger debt forgiven."**

Simon thinks he owes God little; nothing at all, really. So when Jesus comes to his home, there is no kiss for his cheek, water for his feet, and certainly no oil for his head. Just distance, judgment, and self-righteousness.

But then there is this notoriously sinful woman, who lives the answer to Jesus' question. She knows how much God has forgiven her. As Jesus reclines at Simon's table with his feet pointed away from that table, she kisses Jesus' feet and uses her hair and tears to wash them.

There are a few cultural things to know here, in order to understand just how deep this act of love is. Feet are still kind of nasty, but not like they were back then, in that part of the world. I won't go into detail because the purpose isn't to disgust you, but there was a lot of gross stuff on the ground and sandaled feet touched it all. So only the lowliest servants got the job of washing feet. Also, women did not untie their hair in public unless they were serving. That was one way to tell, when you walked into a room, who was your servant. She is there to serve.

And then there's the perfume. This is expensive stuff, coming in an alabaster jar. Usually, people who resort to making their living the way this woman does don't have lots of extra money lying around to spend on perfume. But for Jesus, she uses the best. She lowers herself as far as she can and gives everything she can.

She doesn't just want Jesus in the room with her. She wants Jesus in the middle of her heart. She isn't there to judge him, she's there to receive his forgiveness. **"Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much..."** Then Jesus said to her, **"Your sins have been forgiven."**

Your sins have been forgiven, too. Jesus paid what you could not. Later in Jesus' life, a very similar story takes place. It is down in Bethany, just before Holy Week. This time we are told the woman's name: Mary. She, too, anoints Jesus with very pricey perfume. And, this time, Jesus tells those in the room that she's anointing him for his burial. You have a Savior who died to pay the entire debt you owed for your sins, and he has given you his total righteousness. Jesus says to you, too: **"Your sins have been forgiven."**

Simon's guests are stunned when Jesus forgives sins: **Those reclining at the table began to say among themselves: "Who is this who even forgives sins?"** That's a fair question. He's the Son of God who paid our debt. So when he says, **"Your sins have been forgiven,"** believe that it's true.

Because it's through that faith that Jesus' forgiveness becomes yours, personally. Jesus paid the whole debt for the whole world. Those who believe it receive it. **He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you."** Jesus' gifts are yours and mine through faith in him.

So what will we do now, with faith in our hearts, our unpayable debt paid? Jesus tells the believing woman what to do: **"Go in peace."** When you go from here today, go in peace. When you go out the door to work or the grocery store or the ballpark or the grandma's house, go in peace. The life of a Christian is first a life of peace.

There are so many things in our world that jar us and shake our peace. You don't need to hear them all. You hear them every day. But this is what you have as a Christian: Peace from a Savior who promises:

**“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** There are so many things to make us afraid. But there is one thing that always gives us peace: Jesus, and his forgiving love for us. Go everywhere, anywhere, every day in Jesus’ peace.

What else do we do? **“Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that is why she loved so much.”** Once you understand your hopeless spiritual situation without Jesus, and the depth of his love that paid your debt, you will love. And you will love much.

First and foremost, you will love Jesus. You won’t just want him sort of in the area of your life, sort of around on the periphery. He will be in the center, and the highest recipient of your love. We take his forgiveness by faith, and then we give love to him.

But how? We do not see Jesus. We cannot weep on his feet and wipe them clean with our untied hair. We can’t anoint him with expensive perfume. Well, first we show him love by believing him when he says, **“Your sins are forgiven.”** There is no higher act of love than trusting someone’s word. Take Jesus at his word, and you are showing him love already.

And then, show him love by following his command to love others. No, we don’t see Jesus. But we do have each other, and everyone in this world to love much. And our Savior, whom we cannot see, says this: **“Whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me.”** It always fascinates me that Jesus does not say, “I treat it like you’re doing it for me,” or “It counts like you’re doing it for me.” No: **“You do [it] for me.”** Show much love for others, because Jesus forgives you much.

Showing love to each other does not mean accepting each other’s sin. Jesus never speaks – or even implies – approval for the way this woman had lived her life in the past. In fact, he said she was forgiven much, which means her sins were real. Do not define loving much as approving of sin. That’s not loving much. It’s quite the opposite, actually.

When we love Jesus much by loving others much, we simply need to watch this woman who was forgiven much and then loved much. Watch how she loves!

Like this woman, put yourself in the role of service to others. She unties her hair and publicly marked herself as a servant. Christians are not ashamed of being servants. There is no higher calling than to serve, as our Savior served and saved us.

Like this woman, do the dirty work for other people. Washing feet was the lowliest and nastiest chore in her world. Go low for people. Do acts of service that you find even personally disgusting and reprehensible. This is loving much, because we are forgiven much.

And, like this woman, dig deep. To honor Jesus, she uses perfume that she likely could not even afford. When you show love by serving, go all out with it. Spare no expense when you show love and serve others. Don’t give people minimums of your time and your money and your talents. Give them your best possible, maybe even better than what you may at first consider possible.

She was forgiven much, so she loved much. We are forgiven much, too. And it’s ours through faith. Now let’s go in peace and love much. Amen.