

Luke 7:36-8:3

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. 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. 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. 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." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing 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 were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the 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 afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Have you ever been with someone where you have just explained something to them and you get that look? You know what I am talking about, right? We all have seen that particular look before, haven't we? We have all probably given that look. It is a slight tilt of the head along with a curious squint of one or both eyes, all together signifying that, although every word has been heard, the message just didn't get through.

You know, I'd lay money down on the likelihood that the Pharisee in our passage from Luke this morning had that look. Maybe he got it, maybe he understood what Jesus was getting

at, and, if he did, then another emotion might apply, but I doubt it. I doubt it because by the time that he was hearing Jesus second question about who loved the most, he was probably still looking at the woman and stuck back on his question to himself that was rolling around in his head, of why this Prophet appeared not to know that the woman in the room crying on his feet was a big-time sinner.

He seemed to be in catch up mode from the beginning. At least, that is how I surmise it. I suppose it was possible, but unlikely, that he was ever up to speed on what Jesus was getting to. I mean, when you think about it, how could he? To do so, he had to realize that he was part of the parable, that he was a character in the parable, and that the lesson was for him.

Look at the passage from Simon, the Pharisee's, point of view. Jesus was in the area stirring things up. Leading up to what we heard this morning, the Centurion's servant had been healed. You remember. Just say the word and it will be done. And it was. The son of the widow had been brought back from death as he was being taken out for burial. That one had to stir people up. Disciples from John the Baptist coming to Jesus to ask him if he was the one and he responds by telling them to report back to John what they see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them.

This stuff wasn't done in secret and word spread quickly. And now Jesus is in town and Simon hears him personally, as he sends a message back to John, and decides to invite him for a meal so he could judge for himself, so he could get to the bottom of who this guy was. And once they have found their places around the table and before he can even get started with his questioning of Jesus, this woman shows up and gets Jesus off topic with all her tears shed and her ointment spread. And now Jesus was in his home and not explaining his actions, but rather talking about debt forgiveness. Jesus was teaching, but Simon was stuck on the woman and he had no idea that the lessons were for him.

Simon thought he was the one judging, not the one being judged. He had invited Jesus to dinner in order to make an assessment of him. As it should be. After all, Simon was without sin...or so he would have thought. He was a Pharisee in good standing. God was shining his blessings on him. No sin in him, whatsoever. Of all the people in the room, certainly nothing in the parable applied to him. How could it? It was about sin and forgiveness. As a matter of fact, he was the one who would, in the end, decide who was the biggest sinner in the room, and this Rabbi/Prophet Jesus wasn't off the list yet.

So, lesson one: Simon was the one in our passage, and the parable, in great need of debt forgiveness.

As for that wretched woman who was still weeping all over Jesus, well, she should be weeping, so Simon would have thought. The burden she should have felt from her sin had to be overwhelming. It should have been overwhelming!

The funny thing was that Simon was the only one in our passage, as far as we can tell, that didn't realize that her tears were tears of Joy, not sorrow. Although she had certainly shed tears of sorrow prior to that moment, there could be no doubt of that, they had now been replaced because of what Jesus had already done for her. She had acknowledged her debt and her need for forgiveness and had been forgiven. By the time she entered Simon's home her burden had been lifted, her life had been transformed, and the love was now overflowing out of her.

Lesson two: Great Joy awaited Simon, if he would embrace the forgiveness being offered. Great Joy and Love is possible for those who draw near to God. And no real love, no deep love, is ever possible outside of the presence of God.

Looking at the woman, Jesus confirms to Simon that she had been forgiven. And because of that forgiveness she is showing great love. He tells Simon that the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.

Lesson three: A debt must be recognized before it can be forgiven. You see, Simon's problem is not that Jesus doesn't want to fully forgive him or that forgiveness is not available to him. The parable he told is not about selective forgiveness. It is not about earning forgiveness. And it is not about measuring the amount of forgiveness needed, weighing it against that needed by others.

Simon's problem is that he doesn't acknowledge that a debt is owed. He doesn't feel that forgiveness is needed...for him. Of course, it is for others. For Simon there was no doubt that the woman, and others like her, were notorious sinners needing forgiveness, if that was even possible. Probably not, in Simon's eyes. There is no doubt in Simon's perspective that there are many other sinners who he cannot associate with, who he needs to stay away from, so as not to become tainted by the connection. Simon's problem is that he believes that he is not stained by sin, and Jesus does not forgive that which will not be acknowledged.

So, the question of the passage to us today is: "Who are you?"

Are you Simon? Do you see others solely by their struggles, and their poor choices and willfulness? Do you see the world as being full of people who, if they were to come near, would taint you by their sinfulness? Do you see yourself as one who has no need of forgiveness because you have not done anything for which forgiveness is needed? Are you, like Simon, also missing out on the amazing Joy and the Love that is possible from being forgiven.

Or are you like the woman? Are you carrying a heavy load as a result of your choices but have given them over to the one who can deal with them on your behalf? Are you, like the woman, living a transformed life, uplifted, freed, and filled with Joy and Love that overflows back to God and to those around you?

Or are you, like so many, still sitting around the table simply waiting for the food to make it to your plate, unconcerned about the all the hub bub going on in the room around you?

Lesson four: We are all of the above, at one point or another.

We are Simon lacking in Joy and Love because we are unable to see passed our blindness to our own struggle and our separation from God.

We are the woman, at least potentially...transformed, grateful, full of Joy, overflowing with Love, eyes opened to the possibility of the Kingdom of God, worshipping our Savior.

And we are often those who are oblivious to the unfolding of the Kingdom in our midst... just pass the bread, please.

At one point or another, we are all of the above...As Jesus sits at our table, telling us stories about ourselves.

Amen