

RCC In The Word
Luke 7.36-50
Week of March 12

In our Scripture today, we have a beautifully scandalous story that challenges us to consider our own love and devotion to the Savior. As Jesus dines at the home of a Pharisee, an unexpected visitor enters the house: a woman of the city, a sinner (vs37, 39). She is not an ordinary sinner. Jesus himself acknowledges that her sins are many (vs47), and the use of the word indicates that she is a sinner by profession, perhaps a prostitute. The last place this sinful woman would have ever gone was into the house of a self-righteous Pharisee. You can sense the indignation and judgment of the Pharisee as he says 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**" (vs 39, emphasis added).

Upon entering the house, the sinful woman sees Jesus reclining at the table. Perhaps in that moment, she remembered the day that she had heard him say, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11.28-29). On that day she had come to the Savior. She had taken his yoke. She had found rest. And, now once again she has come to the Savior. She comes on this day to express her gratitude and love for the freedom, forgiveness, peace she had received from him.

In verse 38, every eye in the room turns on the sinful woman. All attention is on her. To capture the magnitude and shock of the moment, we should read the verse slowly. Weeping, she wets his feet with her tears....she wipes his feet with her hair....she kisses his feet....she anoints his feet with the ointment. You can almost hear the murmuring, whispering, gasping of the other guests. Scandalous. Appalling. Disgusting.

Jesus knows Simon's (the Pharisee) heart is full of condemnation, and Jesus is not going to miss this teachable moment. So, he tells a parable to Simon, but everyone in the room can hear it. There was a moneylender who had two debtors. One debtor owed two month's salary; the other owed two year's salary. When these two debtors had nothing to pay, surprisingly, the lender graciously canceled their debts. Jesus asks the Pharisee, "Which of them will love him more" (vs42)? The answer is obvious. Simon responds correctly. "The one for whom he canceled the larger debt" (vs43).

Suddenly, the sinful woman's actions make sense. Her undignified outpouring of love and devotion on Jesus is the result of forgiven sin. She is like the debtor who owed the larger sum. And, like the moneylender, Jesus had forgiven her all her debts. She loved much because she had been forgiven much. The Pharisee, on the other hand, did not realize his need for forgiveness. Comfortable in his self-righteousness, Simon neglected to show Jesus the even common hospitality of the day: no water for the feet, no kiss of greeting, no oil for anointing.

The actions of the sinful woman on that day did not earn her forgiveness. Her actions are a response to the free forgiveness already received. Jesus tells her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (vs50). By grace through faith, she had come to Jesus in all her filthy sin and soul-crushing guilt and received the forgiveness only he could give. Privately forgiven in the past, Jesus now publicly declares her forgiveness. All guests at the table hear him say, "Your sins are forgiven" (vs 48). The word "forgiven" is in the Greek perfect tense indicating this was a declaration of a past action with ongoing results.

Forgiven once and for all. Truly, as far as the east is from the west, the woman's sins had been cast away.

This story teaches us that our love and devotion to the Savior increase in proportion to the awareness of our sinfulness. Sometimes, it is easy for us to forget just how much God has forgiven us in Christ. Like the Pharisee, we tend to think we aren't all that bad. We certainly aren't as sinful as *that woman*! There is nothing that will extinguish love for the Savior faster than self-righteousness. That is why it is good for us to remember and recognize just how sinful we truly are. When we acknowledge that we are the chief of sinners, but have been forgiven by the grace of God, our devotion and love for the Savior will be evident for all to see. Nothing – not the opinions of others, not the cost of the sacrifice, not the risk of embarrassment, not the fear of man – nothing will keep us from pouring out our love on the Savior like expensive oil from an alabaster jar. The consideration of our great sin should not lead us to despair, it should ignite our devotion. Brothers and sisters, we have been forgiven much! Let us love much!

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