

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

LUKE 7:36-50

HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE THE LORD, AND WHY?

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with [olive] oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

How much do you cherish the birthday present you received? That depends, doesn't it? It depends on how much you want it. It depends on how badly you need it. It depends on how easily you could get it yourself. It depends on the love of the person who gives it. It depends on whether you think it's owed to you in the first place.

Our text for today deals with a similar thought. How much do you love Jesus? And why? A Pharisee, identified in the text as "Simon," invited Jesus to eat with him. Pharisees thought they were separate and above everyone else because of how well they kept all God's rules and commands. We don't know what his motive was for inviting Jesus. Was he sincerely interested in who Jesus was (the Savior), and what Jesus taught? It doesn't seem so. Was he deliberately trying to put Jesus into a situation to say something incriminating? There's no evidence of that, although he surely did not see Jesus as his Savior. Perhaps he invited Jesus as a way of continuing to do everything well. It was the socially proper thing to do, to invite the well-known teacher into his house, to show Him courtesy, although not agreeing on many things. Perhaps he felt it was an honorable thing to do.

Jesus accepted the invitation. It's not always easy or fun to accept an invitation extended as a matter of politeness, and not friendship. Yet Jesus went that day, not just to "get it over with." Nor did He go that day, with His armor on, His heart cold, aloof, and distant, ready to ward off all the attacks that might be hurled upon Him. Jesus went that day, to reach out to Simon, to draw Simon to God's mercy and forgiveness. Jesus also went to reach out to the woman. Do not view difficult situations as liabilities, but as opportunities!

Jesus sat down—literally "reclined"—to eat. They reclined on dining couches around the table, as one might lie down on a couch to eat. It was a very relaxing manner. The act of dining together expresses a certain friendship. Indeed, Simon had not received Jesus as an enemy under arrest. And Jesus had willingly accepted, although Simon was far-removed from the true understanding of sin and forgiveness. Beware of being "off-standish" and saying "I don't associate with your kind." Difficult circumstances are a valuable opportunity!

Strange to say, it must have been acceptable custom for outsiders to enter such banquets at homes. Into this scene came a woman, unnamed in the text (some suggest putting your name in for the name). The woman had a reputation--a sinner--not morally respectable. Was it because of her current, or past, lifestyle—breaking commands of God? Either or both. It is easily assumed that she was a prostitute, although that is not directly stated. But she was not a role-model! She stood at the end of Jesus' reclining couch. She stood there crying, washed His feet with her tears, dried His feet with her hair, repeatedly kissed His feet, and poured onto His feet fragrant oil.

Simon considered it a disgrace. Simon said--to himself-- that Jesus definitely was not a prophet, for how would Jesus even allow such a woman to touch Him! Simon's view of a prophet of God was someone who stood for the Laws of God and would rigidly condemn all who failed. Simon did not see a prophet as one whose heart reached out to wayward and sinful people. Did he forget that Moses who vehemently smashed the Ten Commandments and the two tablets of stone when the people worshiped the golden calf, was also the Moses who prayed earnestly that the Lord forgive the people. He even offered that he be blotted out of God's book and the people spared. Compassion.

Here is where Jesus had opportunity to talk to the heart of Simon and to the heart of the woman. He used a parable. Two men owed a creditor money, one 10 times more than the other. Neither could pay. In mercy, both were freely forgiven--without being "grilled" as to why they were unable to pay, or how they would change in the future. Debt forgiven! Such forgiveness generates love. Jesus asks Simon which one of the two would love the creditor more? Simon "supposed" *the one who owed more.* He didn't want to act too sure. Maybe he saw where Jesus was going with this.

"Correct," Jesus said. Directing Simon to look at the woman whom Simon so despised, Jesus out loud compared self-righteous Simon and his actions to the sinful woman and her actions. The woman had come to honor Jesus. She trusted that He was her merciful Savior. She dearly wanted to show her love and thanks for His merciful pardon. However, Simon had not even had his servant do the courtesy of washing Jesus' feet, Simon had not even honored Jesus by anointing his head with olive-oil, and Simon had not even greeted Jesus with the kiss of greeting. The woman had done far more--washed His feet with tears from deep within her sorrowing heart, used her hair as a towel--imagine using your hair to dry someone's feet, kissed His feet repeatedly, and anointed His feet with fragrant oil! Was Simon startled by the facts? His generosity had been rather limited compared to hers, and she was a "sinner." At best, his actions were prompted by a desire to "cover the bases," to do a cordial thing, but not to go out of his way too much for Jesus. She had gone the extra mile!

How much do you love the Lord? Are your actions simply a matter of doing "the minimum required"? Doing what is acceptable in the eyes of others, social politeness? Being generous to a limited degree, using restraint to keep yourself safe? It could be lifting a finger to assist with things at church things which you feel others will do or could do or should do--after all, you've done your fair share, after all they aren't nearly as pressed for time as you are. But it's not only church, I'm talking about. What about love to others? Are you ready to go full ahead for them too? Or let somebody else do it? Do other people who are less blessed than you outshine you with acts of love to others? We all easily fall into Simon's treatment of Jesus compared to the woman's.

But the REAL question and the REAL point is--not "How much do you do for Jesus? or How much do you love Jesus?" --but "Why?" Why do you love Jesus? Why do you do so much for Him? The other way around, "Why do you not love Jesus? Why do you do so little for Him?" The parable provides the answer. And the truth of the parable gave Simon the Pharisee much to think about. Jesus says, *To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.* Jesus is talking about Simon. Is He talking about you? In the parable it was not just two men who owed a third man some unknown amount of money and were forgiven the debts. Each knew how much he owed. One owed ten times as much! Imagine if you were 10 months behind on your house rent vs. 1 month behind. If you were 10 years behind in your pasture or cropland rent vs. 1 year. And then your big debt was forgiven without strings attached--just forgiven! Which forgiveness generates more love in the heart of the debtor? The 10 or 1?

So then, why did Simon show so little love for Jesus? Because he didn't realize what a great sinner he was before God. He was self-confident. The woman knew she was an offense to God. *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.* Her great love was springing from her great forgiveness. Her great love was not just some sort of manufactured performance--because I'm forgiven, I must do this. It came from her heart. It was as natural as fruit on a tree. It was from her new man within. *We love Him because He first loved us.* 1 John 4:19. I pray that you realize how sinful you are before God. Think about it.

To assure her, Jesus addressed her publicly for her publicly known sins. He said to her, *Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.* In front of them all, she knew she was forgiven. Note how Jesus first announces forgiveness, then the faith that He grants grasps onto that forgiveness. Faith does not cause the forgiveness. Then Jesus says, Go, go about your life on earth crossing this way and that, in peace--with the peace of God in your heart. What relief.

Simon had welcomed Jesus that day with self-confidence, and was left with much to think about. The woman had arrived with tears of guilt, and departed forgiven and in peace. I pray the latter is you. Go in peace in Jesus. Cherish Jesus more than any present or any earthly thing.

So be it! Amen!

Pastor Kanzenbach