**April 10, 2016**

**A Reversal of Shame**

**Luke 7:36-50**

**36**When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.

**37**A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

**38**As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

**39**When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

**40**Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.

**41**“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

**42**Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

**43**Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

**44**Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

**45**You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.

**46**You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

**47**Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

**48**Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

**49**The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

**50**Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Good Morning My Sisters and Brothers in Christ! I greet you this morning in the name of Jesus. Jesus, who came, suffered, bled and died, and rose again so that we might be saved. Jesus, Mary’s baby boy and the Son of a Living God!

***Jesus! oh, how sweet the name,  
Jesus! every day the same;  
Jesus! let all saints proclaim  
    Its worthy praise forever.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

As I was not here last Sunday there are some “thank yous” that must be given. I offer special thanks to the Kingdom Seekers, and the CE ministry for the shadow play and the Easter gifts and Egg Hunt. I think we should all thank the Bowden family for preparing Easter breakfast. Especially want to note that Brenda Lamon taught the Adult Sunday School class and will be teaching on 1st Sunday as we move forward. Thank you Brenda. Finally, I want to thank each of you for doing what needed to be done while I was on Spring Break.

This morning we are looking at a story and a parable that is familiar to us. The story is of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, dried His feet with her hair, kissed his feet, and anointed His feet with an expensive bottle of perfume. The parable – the lesson – that Jesus taught was about forgiveness of debts. The four gospel writers tell us of a woman anointing Jesus, but this account in Luke is not to be confused with the others. The other three, Matthew, Mark and John are talking about Mary in Bethany and they name her, but Luke is talking about an unnamed woman and this event occurs early in the ministry of Jesus while the other occurs the week of His death.

Now we must consider why Luke included this event and the others did not. One reason is that Luke was concerned that women were included in the Holy Scriptures. As a non-Jew recording the words and works of Jesus Luke was sensitive to making sure that Jesus’ care and concern for the outsiders – non Jews and women – was documented. Luke needed to record that Jesus treated all with the same respect and care.

As I researched the text this week and taught the ABS on Wednesday I continued to encounter the concepts of theology vs. tradition. Theology – the nature and study of God. Tradition – a way of thinking or behaving that has been passed from one generation to another that may or may not have anything to do with truth or theology. I thought perhaps that was to be the focus of the sermon for today, but God did not present the thoughts in a clear and concise pattern and so I continued to read, look, and speak to the Father.

Where is the message for a church in the 21st century? What is the message for us here on the corner of Orchard and Westwood? How would God have us to respond to a parable on forgiveness and a story of a woman demonstrating her love with what she had and what she knew how to do? Will you pray with me and for me as I raise a serious question? It is a question that you may even hear again as we look at parables for the remaining Sundays in April.

The question:

**Are You Trying to Look Like Jesus or Make Jesus Look Like You?**

**Shall we pray?**

**Father God, sometimes we need to be reminded that forgiveness is one of the things you require of us. Your Son taught us that in order to be forgiven for our sins we had to forgive others for their sins against us. Father, we your people need to hear and heed that message. If it is your will, allow that message to be preached this morning in a way that all hearts and minds might be reached and transformed. Abba, please use me to do your will and keep me ever mindful that I am to be an instrument of your peace. In the matchless name of Jesus we pray. Amen and Amen.**

**Are You Trying to Look Like Jesus or Make Jesus Look Like You?**

In the time of Jesus when you invited someone to your home for a meal you provided them with a servant to wash their feet and if a special guest you anointed their head with oil. Also, during this time men did not sit in chairs around a table to eat, but rather they reclined on the floor on cushions with their head resting on the left arm and the right hand used for eating. It should also be noted that most homes were built around a courtyard and people who were not invited to the meal could sit/stand outside and observe the proceedings.

Think about one of those mansions you see on the lifestyle of the rich and famous where there are outdoor eating areas, with a grill and shelter leading to a beautiful landscaped back yard. That would be closer to the image then a dinner rooming in a traditional home. The need to visualize the surroundings in important because what occurs is visible to not just the invited guests at the meal, but all those who have come because Simon the Pharisee has invited Jesus to his home.

Now that you have a visual in place consider if you will the actions of Simon.

* invites Jesus to dinner
* disrespects Him by not offering water to wash His feet or oil for his head or a kiss as a greeting
* this was not an oversight
* Pharisees were the majority in the Sanhedrin Council they were conservative, ritualistic, believed in the law and the traditions that they had made as important as the law. They when to great lengths to keep themselves from anything that was considered unclean.

So why did Simon, the Pharisee invite Jesus to dinner?

* Jesus was a lower class
* Jesus was a threat to his position
* Jesus was an up and coming Rabbi

We cannot be sure because scripture does not tell us. But we can make a few well-founded guesses

* Simon invited Jesus to show that Jesus was “not all that”
* Simon invited Jesus to show that Jesus was “less than he”
* Simon invited Jesus to test and embarrass Him

**We could say that Simon invited Jesus in order to make Jesus look more like him.**

Into this gathering comes an unnamed woman, a woman who Luke said had lived a sinful life. Luke does not name the sin, but tradition says she was a prostitute. Yet there is no proof in scripture for calling her that. Her sin did not have to be sexual in nature. Her sin could have been

* leaving home without the permission of her father/husband
* speaking to a stranger
* she might have objected to how she was being treated – because she had no rights not granted by father/husband
* she might had taken her hair down in public

All of these were “sins” born of tradition and not theology or the Law of Moses.

She did not have to knock to get in because this was an open door gathering and so she enters. We aren’t told how she knew Jesus was there or even how she knew whom Jesus was – but the important thing is that she did. Maybe she was among the thousands who heard

* “Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
      for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
  **4**Blessed are those who mourn,  
      for they will be comforted.  
  **5**Blessed are the meek,  
      for they will inherit the earth.  
  **6**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
      for they will be filled.  
  **7**Blessed are the merciful,  
      for they will be shown mercy.  
  **8**Blessed are the pure in heart,  
      for they will see God.  
  **9**Blessed are the peacemakers,  
      for they will be called children of God.  
  **10**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
      for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Look at this “sinful” woman very carefully. She does so many things that Simon did not do.

She comes to Jesus - not inviting Jesus to come to her

She honors Jesus in the tradition of the time

* not dishonor for reason(s) we cannot be sure of

She gives to Jesus what she has

– rather then waiting to see what Jesus will give her

She asks nothing of Jesus but receives what He has to offer.

**Are You Trying to Look Like Jesus or Make Jesus Look Like You?**

Finally, at this gathering is Jesus. We must consider His actions as well.

* Jesus accepts an invitation to a place where He knows He will not be well treated.
* Jesus allows Simon to disrespect Him in front of others because Jesus knows this can and will be a teaching moment.
* Jesus accepts the gifts of a sinful woman because Jesus is not concerned about **who she used to be** Jesus is concerned about **who she will become.**

Stay with me and let me tie up the loose ends as the Holy Spirit showed them to me last night. Allow me to use language that might resonant with those present – both young and seasoned (as Russ said yesterday.)

Simon believed himself to be a law-abiding member of the Leadership Council. He saw what He perceived to be a threat to His way of thinking and being and doing and so looked for a way to use that threat and turn it to His advantage. His actions on the outside looked innocent enough, but his thoughts on the inside betrayed him.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Because Simon was concerned about the sinner – and did not acknowledge that he was also a sinner - he missed an opportunity to know and move closer to the lowly Rabbi who was and is Jesus the Christ.

**Are You Trying to Look Like Jesus or Make Jesus Look Like You?**

The unnamed women on the other hand did not think her self very important at all. She only knew that she needed to get to Jesus.

She had lived with how others treated her – she had violated the traditions of the time – she knew the council and most of the men did not respect her in her community. **But her desire was not to please them but to get to Jesus.**

One scholar says that her joy at seeing Jesus was such that she began to shed tears and the tears were so abundant that they were enough to wash the dirty, dusty feet of the Savior. Looking at His now muddy, wet feet, she used what she had to dry them – her hair. Denying the importance of the tradition – not worrying about what others might say or do – she took her hair down and kneeled and wiped the feet of her Lord with her hair. When His feet were cleaned she kissed them and anointed them with oil.

**Are You Trying to Look Like Jesus or Make Jesus Look Like You?**

If we are to be the people God has called us to be sometimes we are going to have to kneel at the feet of Jesus – shedding tears about our sins

not forgiving others

hold a grudge when wronged

praying to live long enough to say

“I told you God don’t like ugly”

If we are to be the people that God has called us to be sometimes we are going to have to work on our insides as hard as we work on our outsides.

We cannot serve God with our bodies and harbor sin in our hearts.

**8**Blessed are the pure in heart,  
    for they will see God.

**Are You Trying to Look Like Jesus or Make Jesus Look Like You?**

1. https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/67 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)