

“Go in Peace”
Sermon delivered 3-21-2010
Immanuel Lutheran Church
Neal Collins, Pastor

Luke 7:36-50

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And 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. ³⁸She 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. ³⁹Now 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.” ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “Speak.” ⁴¹“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” ⁴⁴Then 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. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, 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.” ⁴⁸Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

SHAPED BY THE WORD

As I approached the text for the first draft of this sermon, I sat in prayer. I prayed that I would do more than just give you information about God from Holy Scripture. I prayed I would do more than just make the narrative interesting. I prayed the “the words of my lips and the meditation of my mind be acceptable in your sight O Lord our strength and redeemer.” I asked for formation by the text, and to be shaped by this Word of Life. Leonard Sweet, in his work, *Tsunami* contends in order for this to happen it must be EPIC. The message must be experiential, participatory, and interactive. You may wish to sing or just listen as a prayer as container for our Gospel this morning.

PHARISEES

The story opens with an invitation by Simon, the Pharisee, for Jesus to eat with him. This sounds like an innocuous invitation, like let us meet at Java for coffee. No problem. But - Jesus is attracting all kinds of people; the poor, wealthy, educated, and illiterate, folks up and down the social/religious ladder. Simon is

identified as a Pharisee. To the first century ear, hearing this story would put him in a category of being self righteous, self focused, and self obsessed with their attitude toward others. The Pharisees were truly a group who could see the splinter in the eyes of their brothers and sisters, but failed to see the log in their own. They were experts on the problems others were facing, but failed to see their own problems.

Simon, being a typical Pharisee, would not extend the common courtesy of even giving Jesus some water to wash his feet when he came to the party. The Pharisees did not hold a religious office. They were lay folks. They rejected the Baptism of John when he was baptizing folks in the Jordan. Please know, they were not “bad” people... nonetheless Jesus said the tax collectors and prostitutes would get into the kingdom of heaven before them, but not instead of them. We don’t know if Simon invited Jesus to his house. Luke is writing at a time when the Pharisees are becoming the outcast of the society. Luke portrays Jesus as eating with everyone from the Pharisees to the tax collectors.

THE WOMAN

“...Jesus took his place at the table”. When you picture this in your mind I want you to see him reclining on the floor with his feet away from the table. “...a woman in the city, who learned he was eating in the Pharisee’s house... came, stood behind him at his feet, weeping...bathing his feet with her tears, drying with her hair... kissing and anointing his feet.” The “woman” violated several social customs. Women did not intrude on men eating, not even the wives. Touching, kissing, drying, bathing, and anointing would raise every eyebrow in the place. The suspicion would be clearly written on everyone’s face, and without a doubt they would be making some conjectures about this woman, and about Jesus.

RED FLAGS

All four Gospels report this story. All of them have someone saying “shame on you”. But Luke put the focus on hospitality by the woman who crashes the party with her tears and kissing the feet of Jesus. We all seem to have a program that sets off a red flag when our perceived social customs are being violated. Simon’s red flag alerted him as the woman was kissing his feet, and said to himself, “If, If, If, If... this man were a prophet he would know what kind of woman she is.” So, the logic follows if he doesn’t know, he must not be a prophet. We all seem to have these “red flags,” consciously or unconsciously we say to ourselves – “If.”

I don’t think we can help it. We constantly are judging, making decisions, and evaluating others. Maybe this comes from our evolutionary genes, to fight or take flight. Nonetheless, we do it. We do it for acceptance of living in the right place, having the acceptable vocation, eating the right food, drinking the right wine. In order to figure out how right we are, we need to contrast this against what we are not.

THE GREAT "IF"

Like it or not, we are Simon, not certain how you would say the female version of this name, but are the Pharisee. If cleanliness is next to godliness, then join the club! We are a culture of superlatives. This is all we know. We pay a price for membership in this club. The fear of being the outcast, deep down in all of us there is a sneaking suspicion that we are not enough. Do more, be more, have more, it eats away at us. So, we understand Simon's comment more than we know, or admit, about the great "If."

FORGIVING DEBT

Jesus tells the story of a certain creditor who forgives the debts, one for 50 and another for 500. Who would be most grateful? Simon says, "I suppose the one who canceled the greater debt." I suppose. Simon is like many of us, who see our sins as being small, like maybe we owe 50. Maybe our attitude of self-sufficiency separates us from God. The more oblivious we are, the greater the gap. Maybe we can't see our own shortcomings, but can clearly see them in others. I don't want you walking out of here becoming more self focused - only this time not on your superiority, but on your inferiority. It is still self-focused.

GO IN PEACE

Jesus says to the woman "go in peace". This is what we all want to happen. We all want to go in peace. We all want to leave here this morning with "the peace of God that passes all understanding." Peace comes with acceptance and forgiveness. The Templeton Foundation funded a research study on people's attitude toward forgiveness, with the University of Michigan and the National Health Institute. Seventy-Five per cent of Americans are confident, very confident they have been forgiven by God. Dr. Loren Toussanit, was surprised by this revelation. However, less than half claimed they had been forgiven by others. It is difficult to forgive others yet we want to "go in peace". (Hozee)

SITTING AT THE TABLE

Let us go back to the party. Let us invite a couple of other folks to the party. Let us imagine present at this party is a person who will not forgive you, and sitting on the other side of you is someone you avoid, someone you don't want to speak with, someone you know is beneath you. Sitting across the table is the same Jesus that sat at the table with Simon. You are just sitting there, Jesus is looking at you with compassionate eyes, what do you say, what does he say to you?

WHERE DOES SHE GO?

Jesus said to the woman, "Go in Peace". Where did she go? Where does one go when Jesus tells them to "go in peace?" Fred Craddock says, "The one place where this woman is welcomed is on the street, among people like herself. What she needs is a community of forgiveness (not judgment). The story screams for a church, not just any church, but a church that speaks and lives this message of

forgiveness.” We all need such a place where we can as the song says “Take, Oh, Take Me As I Am.

TAKE ME or CHANGE ME?

The words we will be singing in a few minutes say, “Take me as I am; summon out what I shall be; set your seal upon my heart and live in me.” A lot of us buy into the unconditional love of God in Jesus Christ for us, very Lutheran. Mark Allen Powell writes (In the Eastern Star/P.181) he attended a seminar where a large African American man had two big signs, one read “Jesus Christ accepts you the way you are” the other said, “Jesus Christ will change your life.” You get excited that Jesus will accept you as you are. Some of us begin to wonder whether this isn’t because you plan on staying the way you are. Now, where I come from, in the inner city, I know folks who, if you tell them, “Jesus accepts you the way you are” will respond, “Well that is nice of him, but the fact is I don’t really like being the way I am. My life isn’t so good. It is nice that Jesus loves me even though I am poor and hungry and my life is a mess, but you know what some really good news would be? Really good news would be if he change my life so I don’t have to be this way.”

Jesus accepts us where we are, like the woman, like Simon (we don’t know what happened to Simon), but never leaves us where he finds us. Where are you this morning? Again, this is about you reformatting the hard drive of your life. This is about the power of God, as we will now sing “Take, Oh take Me As I AM”