

Willetton Uniting Church

Sunday 20th July 2025

Bible Reading

Luke 7:36-50. ³⁶When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A 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. ³⁸As 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.

³⁹When 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." ⁴⁰Jesus 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. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴Then 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. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Message – The Sinful Woman

The Event (Luke 7:36-40). Luke presents us a great story in the life of Jesus. One of the Pharisees, named Simon, invites Jesus to come to his house and eat with him. In the first century, the Pharisees were the largest and most influential religious sect in Judaism. They demanded strict adherence to the Law of Moses and to their oral interpretations of the Law. Jesus and the Pharisees clashed on many occasions over their interpretations of the Law, and established traditions and practices. So, why then did this Pharisee invite Jesus to eat in his home (the account from Luke does not provide this background)? It does not seem that Simon was looking to question Jesus about a particular matter or accuse him. Neither does it seem that Simon respected Jesus much or considered him an honourable guest, because Simon did not extend to Jesus basic etiquette and hospitality when Jesus arrived – water to wash his dusty / muddy feet, a greeting kiss on the cheek, oil to refresh his head. Perhaps Simon is simply curious about Jesus, because Jesus taught with authority and performed many miracles, and wants to ascertain the truth about who Jesus is. Regardless, Simon extends an invitation to dinner and Jesus willingly accepts, and he goes to Simon’s house and reclines at his table.

Reclining at the table was actually a Greek custom that the Jews adopted for festive banquets. Those invited to a banquet would recline at a low table, laying on their side and leaning on a pillow, with their head turned towards the table, and their legs and feet tucked / extended out behind them. It was not unusual, when these banquets were held and special guests were invited, to have an open-door

policy. Neighbours and other people in the town could come in, witness the banquet and listen to the conversation.

During the dinner, a woman in the town, described as a sinner, learns that Jesus is at the Pharisee's house. This woman is not just a sinner, but a notorious sinner (everyone in the town knows). Given this public knowledge, it is likely that she is a prostitute or very sexually immoral. She would not have been welcome in any Pharisee's house, so what she does next is completely out of the ordinary. She arrives at Simon's house with an expensive alabaster jar of perfume, likely her greatest treasure. She enters Simon's house and stands behind Jesus at his feet. And she cries, but she is not just misty eyed or gently weeping. She is not just shedding a tear or two. She is bawling / sobbing uncontrollably, because she is wetting Jesus' feet with her tears. Can you imagine how much crying it would take to wet someone's feet? She then stoops down and wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, kisses his feet, and anoints his feet with the perfume that she bought. In those days, people walked around in sandals and the roads were very dusty and muddy. Can you imagine wiping the dirty feet of another person with your hair? This is an amazing act of love, an amazing act of humility. Clearly, something significant has happened that moves this woman to seek out Jesus and do this.

When Simon sees this unfold, instead of being emotionally moved by this woman and her affection, her humility and her gratitude, he responds with disdain. Simon does not care about this woman. He is not moved by the love that she shows Jesus. She is a notorious sinner, a despicable immoral woman. Simon says 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." To Simon this completely discredits Jesus. Now he knows who Jesus is, he is certainly not sent from God. If Jesus were a prophet, he would not let this disgrace happen. Jesus would know who this woman is and the kind of woman she is. What Simon does not realise, is that Jesus is the Son of God and knows exactly who this woman is and the kind of woman she is.

Jesus also knows what is going on in Simon's heart and mind, and he decides to share with Simon a parable.

The Parable (Luke 7:41-50). Jesus shares a parable about a moneylender who has two debtors. One owed the moneylender 500 denarii and the other owed 50 denarii (one denarius was a day's wage). As such, one debtor has about a two-month debt and the other debtor as about a 21-month debt. What is very important is that neither debtor can repay their debt. Out of graciousness, the moneylender cancels the debt of both debtors. Neither can repay and both are forgiven their debt. Jesus then asks Simon, "Now which of them will love him more?" Simon responds, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." The one with the greater debt will show the greater love.

Jesus then applies the parable to Simon and the woman. Jesus says, "Do you see this woman?" Jesus continues by describing how Simon failed or refused to extend basic etiquette and hospitality when Jesus arrived at his house. Simon did not provide a bowl of water for Jesus to wash his own feet. The woman wet Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. Simon did not greet Jesus with a customary kiss on the cheek when Jesus entered his house. The woman kissed his feet repeatedly. Simon did not offer Jesus any oil to refresh his head. The woman anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume.

Jesus concludes (this is the key point, in verse 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." Jesus is not saying that the woman's sins were forgiven because she loved much. That is not the point of the parable. The point is that she loved much because her many sins were forgiven.

Application. In this account, Luke is showing us two responses to Jesus based on two different attitudes about sin and forgiveness. Why did the woman act the way she did? Why did she show so much courage to go into the house of a Pharisee, who would have no compassion for her, and seek out Jesus? Why was her

emotional response so great? Because she understood her sinful condition and her desperate need for forgiveness. She grasped the gravity and the multitude of her sins. She knew that she was the one who owed the moneylender much, she had the 21-month debt. That is why she must find Jesus; she knew who Jesus is. That is why she is overflowing with tears. That is why she pours out a fragrant perfume (her greatest treasure) on Jesus' feet. Simon's response was the opposite because he did not recognise who Jesus is and realise his need for Jesus. He did not see himself as a great debtor, maybe not even a debtor at all.

We learn an important principle from this account. Our awareness of our own spiritual condition is tied to / influences our actions. If we love Jesus so little and show little affection, humility and gratitude, it is because we have little idea how much we have been forgiven. When we fail to grasp the weight of our sins and recognise how much we have been forgiven, then we will become unemotional and disconnected, we will only do the minimum, and we will not pour out our lives like expensive perfume. We will have the same attitude as Simon, and we will become heartless minimalists (treating others with disdain and doing little for Jesus). What is your attitude toward sin and forgiveness? What do your actions reveal about your love for Jesus (do you love much or love little)? When is the last time that we were moved by our sins like this woman? **Amen.**