

Sermon for June 12, 2016 - 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:36-50 (NIV84)

Theme: Do you see this woman?

- 1) *She came to Jesus a sinner.*
- 2) *She left Jesus a saint.*

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸ and 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 men 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 canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "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—for she loved much. But he who 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."

How would you react?

Imagine a well known homosexual comes to worship the same day we're having a potluck. After the service he goes down into the fellowship hall and, after finding where I am sitting, runs up and hugs me - all the while crying loudly. What kind of thoughts would be running through your head? Would you be concerned for the man, or feel uncomfortable and somewhat annoyed that he showed up? Would you consider him the very picture of faith, or somewhat troubled and unstable? And what would you think about me - the person he's hugging and crying over?

As you probably figured out: the situation I described is very similar to what happened to Jesus in our sermon text. A sinful woman was making a scene. Everybody watched her, and yet only Jesus saw this woman for who she truly was - holding her up as an example of repentance and faith. Let us consider these things, under the theme: **Do you see this woman?** 1) *She came to Jesus a sinner.* 2) *She left Jesus a saint.*

Part One: She came to Jesus a sinner.

We don't exactly know when or where our sermon text takes place, but at some point, early in Jesus ministry, *one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him.*

Why would a Pharisee invite Jesus to dinner? We don't know. Perhaps Jesus just gave a discourse in the synagogue and the Pharisee wanted to find out more about him. Regardless of the reason, Jesus accepted the invitation - *so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.*

Now, before I go on, I should explain that the Jews in Jesus day did not "sit" for dinner like we do. They used dining couches instead of chairs and would lie on their sides perpendicular to the table. Knowing this will help you picture what happened next.

When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and 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.

Who was this woman and why was she there? Did the Pharisees "plant" her in the party to test Jesus? The way our text is worded in its original language makes it obvious this was not the case. She came uninvited. But how did she get in? Well, you have to understand that this dinner party was not like the typical dinner parties we have in our day. The door was open. People could come and go as they pleased. Picture it as being like a church potluck or an open house graduation party. Maybe then you can understand how she was able to get in.

But here is the thing: no one expected her. She was a known sinner in the community, someone whom the Pharisees would openly condemn. The last place you would expect her would be in a Pharisee's house, surrounded by his friends. And yet, there she stood. She crashed this party to see Jesus. And when she saw him, she broke down crying. Stooping over Jesus she let her many tears wet his feet. She let down her hair - a woman's pride back then - and wiped his dusty feet clean with it. She applied a sweet smelling ointment and kissed his feet as tenderly as a father or mother might kiss their child. She did all this in front of everyone.

You have to understand how shocking this situation was. Jewish men did not usually speak with female strangers, let alone allow themselves to be touched or kissed by them. Jewish women would never let down their hair in public, let alone wipe someone's feet with it. And yet all this happened to Jesus, who said nothing.

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."

Notice how quickly the Pharisee judges - not just the woman, but Jesus as well. If he would allow an unclean sinner to touch him like that, then he, obviously, couldn't be a prophet.

Jesus knew what was in the heart of this Pharisee. He also knew what was in the heart of this woman. Everyone saw her as a dirty, troubled sinner who was not worth the effort to save. Jesus, however, saw in her the kind of person God loves: a repentant sinner. She trusted that Jesus was her promised Savior. And even though no one in her community loved her, she trusted that He would. She heard his preaching on repentance and the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit awakened a faith in her heart that believed that, no matter how sinful she was, Jesus would forgive her. And this is why she had to see Jesus. She wanted to express her repentance and faith in him. And this is why she boldly did what she did - not caring what people might think of her. Her entire focus was Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, do you see this woman? She was not afraid to come before Jesus as a sinner. She was not afraid of the condemning eyes of the Pharisees. All that mattered to her was Jesus and the forgiving love he promised to all who turned to him in repentance and faith.

What matters to you? Are you willing to be like this woman and approach Jesus with all your sins hanging out there for him to see? Are you willing to suffer public shame for public sins - as you openly confess them to the LORD? Or do you hide behind a mask of propriety - telling yourself that you are a good person who doesn't really have many sins that need to be confessed?

So often we can be like Simon the Pharisee - coming to Jesus with our works. We think that what we offer God is really something when it, in fact, is nothing at all - just like the Pharisee's dinner. But the truth is that God is never impressed with the great works we might do to earn his favor. What he wants is for us to acknowledge the truth about ourselves and our need for him. King David once wrote: *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* (Psalm 51:16-17 NIV84).

Jesus wants us to come to him with all our sins - laying them all at his feet as the woman in our text did with her tears. It is only when we do this that we can rise forgiven - holy and free from all sin.

Part Two: She left Jesus a saint.

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking. He could have easily let it pass, but he didn't. He loved this Pharisee too. This is why *Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"*

To put the parable in modern terms, who would love the merciful moneylender more: a man forgiven a \$2900 debt, or the man forgiven \$29,000?

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

It was common courtesy in Jesus day to offer guests water to wash their dusty, dirty feet, and olive oil as a balm from the hot, dry sun. Friends would also greet each other with a kiss - sort of like the French do. Simon didn't do any of these things and thereby revealed his true feelings about Jesus: that he was no-one to be concerned about.

And why did Simon view Jesus in this way? Because he wasn't looking for a Savior. He didn't think that his sins were all that bad that they needed to be forgiven. He convinced himself that he could please God on his own. Therefore he never entertained the thought that Jesus was his Savior.

The sinful woman, however, saw Jesus as her Savior and loved him dearly. She knew her sins. She trusted in his forgiveness. This is why she expressed her love the way she did.

"Therefore," Jesus said, *"I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much."* Or to say it another way: "All her sins have been forgiven her - proof of this fact is how willing she is to express her love." *But he who has been forgiven little loves little.* That is to say: "If a person does not think they need the forgiveness I offer, well then they will treat me like you treated me, Simon. Their lack of love proves that they don't believe or value the salvation I offer."

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

The woman looked to Jesus in faith, and Jesus forgave her. And notice that Jesus didn't say: "I forgive you from this point on, because you showed love to me." No, he says that her sins are forgiven. In other words, they were forgiven before she came to the house. Because she trusted Jesus' promises, she received what He offered. She was at peace with God and could start a new life - leaving her sinful ways behind and living as His dearly loved daughter, certain of the eternal life he offered.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: learn from this text. Our sinful human nature often gets us to act like Simon. We hide our sins so well that we hide them from ourselves. We are tempted to view ourselves as good people who don't need to be forgiven all that much. When we do this, we lose our appreciation of what Jesus did for us. And why is that? Because we no longer see his work as vital as it actually is.

Be like the woman in this text. Understand how horribly evil you are and acknowledge your sins. Come to Christ in repentance - trusting in his mercy to forgive. Lay your sins at Jesus feet, just as the woman did, and leave them there. Trust that he has already taken care of them because His resurrection proves that he did.

Do you see this woman? My prayer is that, in seeing her, you see yourself in her. Come to Christ a sinner and leave a saint: a forgiven child of God. Forsake your sinful ways and, with his strength, live to his glory. Amen.