

## Sermon Notes – Voice of Advent - LOVE – Sun 24<sup>th</sup> Dec 2023

### Luke 7:36-50 CSB

#### Much Forgiveness, Much Love

<sup>36</sup> Then one of the Pharisees invited him to eat with him. He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> And a woman in the town who was a sinner found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. She brought an alabaster jar of perfume <sup>38</sup> and stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears. She wiped his feet with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the perfume.

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—she's a sinner!"

<sup>40</sup> Jesus replied to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

He said, "Say it, teacher."

<sup>41</sup> "A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii,<sup>[a]</sup> and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?"

<sup>43</sup> Simon answered, "I suppose the one he forgave more."

"You have judged correctly," he told him. <sup>44</sup> Turning to 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, with her tears, has washed my feet and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. <sup>46</sup> You didn't anoint my head with olive oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

<sup>49</sup> Those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

#### Supporting Scripture

These are moments where Jesus was speaking to and had travelling with a crowd of people. Luke showing in these verses how the word of God was being heard by and having an influence on more and more people.

## **Luke 5:12 Christian Standard Bible**

### **A Man Cleansed**

<sup>12</sup> While he was in one of the towns, a man was there who had leprosy<sup>[a]</sup> all over him. He saw Jesus, fell facedown, and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

## **Luke 6:17 Christian Standard Bible**

### **Teaching and Healing--**

<sup>17</sup> After coming down with them, he stood on a level place with a large crowd of his disciples and a great number of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon.

### **Luke 6:27 - Love Your Enemies**

<sup>27</sup> “But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you,

### **Luke 7:9**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus heard this and was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found so great a faith even in Israel.”

### **Luke 7:11 - A Widow’s Son Raised to Life**

<sup>11</sup> Afterward he was on his way to a town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd were traveling with him.

### **Luke 7:16**

<sup>16</sup> Then fear<sup>[a]</sup> came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen among us,” and “God has visited<sup>[b]</sup> his people.”

In my study and listening to and reading other sermons it was pointed out how it’s important to recognise that a crowd is, a group of people gathering, but that it is also made up of individuals.

Also, that when Jesus was speaking to these crowds there would have been individuals who responded to the call for repentance and faith – and embraced his offer of love and forgiveness.

We will come back to why that it is important shortly.

## Point # 1 – Forgiveness Results in Unbridle Extravagant Love

Luke 7:36

<sup>36</sup> Then one of the Pharisees invited him to eat with him. He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

We are not sure why Jesus was invited to Simon the pharisees house?

It could have been that he was one of these people that like to be seen with the right people at the right time – trying to build his own importance and significance.

Or – it could have been that he was trying to catch Jesus out – we are not sure.

But as we progress, we will for sure get a flavour of Simon's intentions and his heart.

He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

Now in those days there were formalities that happened as honored guests entered your house and should have happened as Jesus entered Simon's house.

Some of those would have been things like...

- The host putting his hand upon the shoulder of Christ and then kissing him on both cheeks – as a symbol of peace.
- Then he should have arranged for Jesus' feet to be washed.
- Then oil or incense used as a fragrance being placed on Jesus' head.

As we get to the end of the story, we see that none of these things happened.

So, we may be asking ourselves why then did Simon the pharisee ask Jesus to come?

Again, we are not sure why Jesus was invited to Simon the pharisees house?

It could have been that he was one of these people that like to be seen with the right people at the right time – trying to build his own importance and significance – because there would have been all sort of other high-ranking people-pharisees present.

Or – again, it could have been that he was trying to catch Jesus out.

reclined at the table –

So, we understand what this looked like...

- lying into the table – so it would have been on the ground – probably outside in a square courtyard that would have had flowers all around it and a water fountain/feature in the middle – the food in the middle of the courtyard.

- They would all have been leaning on either their left or right arm – leaving the other hand free to eat.
- So, it's in this picture we see that their feet would trail behind them.
- So, as they were all lying around the dinner table you would be able to see and have access to a circle of feet that would have been behind them all – including Jesus.
- This would have meant that people who were in the courtyard could see have access to their feet.
- All kinds of people would have had access to these feasts as they were quite the spectacle.
- It was customary for onlookers to wonder in and out.
- These would have been people from the community and those who had some sort of connection to the homeowner.
- And others who would have been total strangers seizing the opportunity to go in and find out what was going on.
- So here no one expresses shock that the woman is present.

But the scandal is that she has drawn close to Jesus, and he has let her approach him.

One commentary writer puts it this way...

*“As long as she sat in the bleachers, everything was fine, but when she steps onto the playing field, people become upset.*

*They don't think a spectator should become a key player.”*

Moving on to verse 37 we read this...

**[37 And a woman in the town who was a sinner found out that Jesus was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. – ESV – Woman of the city](#)**

**[a woman in the town who was a sinner.](#)**

- The only thing we know about this woman is that she was a sinner.
- Some commentaries using the words “notorious sinner.”
- The fact that she is a sinner is mentioned three times: by Luke (**in Luke 7:37**) as we have just read, by the Pharisee (Luke 7:39),

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—**she’s a sinner!**”

and by Jesus himself (Luke 7:47).

<sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, **her many sins** have been forgiven;

People usually assume that she was some kind of prostitute, and they may be right.

Luke describes her as someone off the streets, again some commentaries mentioning that this gives the connotation of sexual sin. Whether she was a gossip or a call girl, she was still a sinner.

### She brought an alabaster jar of perfume

It wasn’t uncommon for a woman to wear a vial of perfume around her neck.

- Often the perfume was in a jar made of alabaster – some would say that this meant it was the good stuff.

**Alabaster**, fine-grained, massive [gypsum](#) that has been used for centuries for statuary, carvings, and other ornaments. It normally is snow-white and translucent but can be artificially dyed; it may be made [opaque](#) and similar in appearance to [marble](#) by [heat treatment](#). Florence, [Livorno](#), and Milan, in [Italy](#), and Berlin are important centres of the alabaster trade. The alabaster of the ancients was a brown or yellow [onyx](#) marble.

- We see similar events throughout the bible as woman carried these kinds of things.

We don’t know how this lady got it, some would assume it was through her sinful exploits!

The woman proceeded to pour her perfume on Jesus’ feet, anointing them with oil.

Perfume was highly prized in those days, so the woman was giving Jesus an expensive gift. It may have been the most precious thing she owned - precious and expensive.

This kind of anointing was practiced at civic feasts and for the purifying of priests or the tabernacle (Ex 30:25–30; Josephus *Antiquities* 3.8.6 §205; 19.9.1 §358), not to mention for preserving corpses (Lk 23:56). If this perfume was nard, it would have cost three hundred denarii, or about a year’s salary, per pound!

## Supporting Verse Exodus 30:25-30 Christian Standard Bible

<sup>25</sup> Prepare from these a holy anointing oil, a scented blend, the work of a perfumer; it will be holy anointing oil.

<sup>26</sup> “With it you are to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony, <sup>27</sup> the table with all its utensils, the lampstand with its utensils, the altar of incense, <sup>28</sup> the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. <sup>29</sup> Consecrate them and they will be especially holy. Whatever touches them will be consecrated. <sup>30</sup> Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them to serve me as priests.

## Luke 23:55-56 - The Burial of Jesus

<sup>55</sup> The women who had come with him from Galilee followed along and observed the tomb and how his body was placed. <sup>56</sup> Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

Nard is a precious ointment, perfume, or medicine. In Mark 14 a woman pours this very costly substance on Jesus' head while he was at supper in the house of Simon the leper. In John 12 Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet with nard.

## Luke 7:38 continues.

<sup>38</sup> and stood behind him at his feet,

- So, we understand how she gained access as did many others – but it certainly wouldn't have been the kind of access that she was seeking and as we achieved or that was expected or welcomed.

weeping, and began to wash his feet with her tears. She wiped his feet with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the perfume.

Now we need to give some consideration to how determined this lady was!

We know that everyone in the room would know of her, and her notoriety would have gone before her!

She was so determined that she was prepared to bear the looks of discontent, people for sure would have been looking at her and all that was unfolding and thinking to themselves – *“What on earth does she think she is doing”!*

She had to of come prepared/ready to be looked upon which such hatred for the sake of what she is about to do – something she wanted to do at all costs.

Her actions reflect great cost, care and emotion.

If we cast our minds back to Jesus' arrival – this woman is about to do, what Simon was supposed to have done for Jesus, but failed to do, maybe even chose not to do!

- but she takes things to a whole another level.

One Commentary put it this was...

*This was a gesture of humility. Ordinarily, perfume would have been used to anoint someone's head. Only a slave would care for someone's feet. But this woman was willing to take the position of a servant, trusting Jesus not to use her and abuse her the way that other men would, and some men had. With reverence and submission, she washed her Master's feet, giving him the highest honor.*

*This was also an expression of astonishing affection. When the woman poured out her perfume, she was pouring out her heart with the fragrance of her love.*

So, she bends over the feet of Christ to do for him that which Simon the Pharisee had failed to do.

**Weeping** – Approaching a reclining Jesus, she anoints his feet as tears of joy and appreciation pour out upon him – so this isn't a scene of mourning.

**Question** – Why does she cry?

- This woman at some point would have seen and heard Jesus – out of what she had heard and now knew to be true – this caused her to weep at the knowledge of the depths of her sin and in faith coming to Jesus in this moment. – reference supporting scripture at the beginning.
- These are genuine tears of joy, the tears that fall are also evidence of guilt of conviction – overcome with emotion – many of us will know what that is like – when all of a sudden – it may be while we are worshipping through song, reading scripture or perhaps someone is sharing their testimony and in that moment the holy spirit touches our heart – I know I have been there for sure – many a times.

She cries because she is now in the very place that is allowing her to do what she so desperately wants to do for Jesus.

Something she dearly to do for some time now.

To somehow make contact with Jesus and make it perfectly clear that she was amazed by his love – she is overwhelmed by his goodness, her joy and conviction.

I am not sure that she saw things unravelling like this though?

In some ways she seems totally unprepared for what is happening.

and began to wash his feet with her tears. She wiped his feet with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the perfume.

- She is crying so much that she is able to wash Jesus' feet – not sure she had considered this because she had nothing but her hair to wipe his feet!
- So, she lets down her hair.

The undoing of her hair is culturally shocking – a definite no no!

In those days it was shameful for a woman to let down her hair in public. In fact, the Talmud went so far as to say that a man could divorce his wife if she showed her hair to another man.

But this woman no longer cared what other people thought. She was so in love with Jesus that she forgot herself entirely. Purely and passionately, it is important to note that it wasn't done erotically, she let her hair fall on his feet.

- In the Talmud (**the primary source of Jewish law**) a woman could remove her clothing and suffer no greater offence than of letting down her hair.

Interesting to note that in one of the commentaries I read it noted that everything to this point had been done in silence – nothing had been said!

kissing them and anointing them with the perfume.

- The woman kissing of Jesus' feet expresses an intimacy shunned in this culture.

kissing - the tense of the verb, she went on kissing them – extravagantly even.

- This again showing that outpouring of love – it was considered an extravagant love of a forgiven sinner.

Throughout the book of Luke, we see him reveal the true identity of Jesus Christ, and people responding to him in faith.

- In this account the woman is responding to Jesus in love.

### **Key Point**

A point to note for us is that a disciple is a lover; Jesus desires the affection of our hearts as well as the faith of our minds.

**Question** – Do we greet Jesus with extravagant affection - fall into the arms of his love, bow at his feet in worship, and weep for joy that all our sins are forgiven?

Simon the pharisee was offended by what the woman was doing, embarrassed by her outward display of emotion.



## Point # 2 – The Foolishness of Ungodly Self-Address

Luke 7:39 continues...

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—she’s a sinner!”

### - Said to himself!

Most commonly in the Hebrew Bible, inner speech depicts the thoughts of the wicked. The fool says “in his heart” that there is no God (Psalm. 14:1), for instance, while the one who turns away from God blesses himself “in his heart” (Deuteronomy. 29.19). These and other passages in Wisdom literature emphasize the folly of ungodly self-address (Ecclesiastes 1:16; 2:1, 3, 15; 3:17, 18; Zephaniah 2:15; 1 Samuel 18:17, 21; 27:1; 1 Kings 12:26).

- The pharisee when he sees this, *says to himself* – if this man was a profit – who I invited in tonight – really was the person he claimed to be – then he would know who is touching him!

I am sure we are not surprised by his response – as we read scripture, we are able to get a pretty clear picture of how the pharisees think!

He was judgmental.

Quick to condemn her for her sins, he had already made up his mind from what he knew of her and what others had said about her - for sure placing her sin in a different category from himself.

His thinking “*He* was righteous, but *she is* a sinner.

We have a phrase for that - *a holier-than-thou lifestyle*.

The pharisees always looked down on people, commenting with disgust even over their sins.

He not only called the woman “a sinner,” he also alluded to “what sort of woman” she was. So judgmental.

touching him

- The phrase used for touching him has sexual overtones, elsewhere within scripture the same word is used with reference to sexual activity.

To say that the Pharisee viewed the woman with disdain – is to put it mildly!

Then he goes on to say this about Jesus

“This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—she’s a sinner!”

“He would know what she is doing – he would know who she is – you can imagine him saying to himself “*but he clearly doesn’t, or he wouldn’t let her touch him.*”

**Question –** Who is the one who doesn't understand?

Of course, it's the Pharisee.

The Pharisees think that Jesus likes nice people or should like nice people!

We see throughout scripture that the Pharisees continually get upset with Jesus because he likes and hangs out with bad people – more so than good people.

The Pharisee reacts first, and he's blaming Jesus.

The woman's contact with Jesus is outrageous and intolerable.

At this point the Pharisee is thinking that Jesus is not a prophet. His actions (the fact that he does not turn this woman away) indicate his lack of status.

There is a theological assumption in his evaluation: his thinking is that religious/spiritual figures like prophets have nothing to do with sinners.

That thought of - If spiritual people are to maintain purity and testimony, association with sinners is prohibited.

But Jesus has a different view.

- Remembering that up until this point nothing has been said!

<sup>39</sup> When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself,

It is ironic that the Pharisee doubts that Jesus is a prophet, yet Jesus has read his mind, and we are about to see that in his response.

**Point # 3 –** Great Forgiveness Provides the Opportunity for Great Love.

Luke 7:40:41

<sup>40</sup> Jesus replied to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

He said, "Say it, teacher."

<sup>41</sup> "A creditor had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii,<sup>[a]</sup> and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?"

So - One has a debt ten times that of the other (*the difference is between about two months' debt and slightly over one and a half year's debt*).

They are both forgiven their debt – but if we were to imagine coming to end of a 5-year term on our mortgage and going into the bank to negotiate!!! enter into a new term and being told that our debt has been cancelled! – what would our response be!!!

So, which of them will love him more?"

Jesus is saying, imagine the appreciation and love that would flow from the one who has been forgiven a great debt.

We've to remember that the debtor has no bargaining position; only grace allows the debt to be removed.

So which debtor has the greater love?

Some would say that the Pharisee is a good student.

When he replies in Verse 43, "I suppose the one he forgave more."

You can see his reluctance to answer knowing he has been caught out!!!

- Offering his response, a little sheepishly!

"I suppose"

Jesus commends his response.

"You have judged correctly," he told him.

Jesus is making his point very clear: great forgiveness provides the opportunity for great love.

What Jesus was pointing out is that the woman was a five hundred denarii sinner and that he was a fifty denarii sinner!

**A quote from one of my favourite preachers ...**

*But – you are still a sinner – she understands it – you don't – she cries you don't – she washes – you don't – she anoints - you don't – she loves much – you don't.*

*Those who have been forgiven the most – love the most.*

*Reflecting on the fact that some of the biggest sinners in the church have been the greatest saints.*

Commentary writer...

*"When God forgives a notorious sinner for much sin, the realization of such bountiful forgiveness means the potential for great love."*

Luke 7:44

<sup>44</sup> Turning to 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, with her tears, has washed my feet and wiped them with her hair.

<sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but she hasn’t stopped kissing my feet since I came in. <sup>46</sup> You didn’t anoint my head with olive oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume.

- All you have failed to do – she has done and even more – these expressions of love and devotion are an indication of the richness of her sense of forgiveness.

<sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, her many sins **have been** forgiven; that’s why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little.” <sup>48</sup> Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

- **HAVE BEEN** - acknowledging that she had come to realisation of her sinfulness prior to this (mention of the supporting verses talking of the crowds) – she loved much not to be forgiven – but as a result of having been forgiven so much.

Well known hymn.

### It Is Well

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—  
My sin, not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to His Cross, and I bear it no more;  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

This lady like many have done and maybe some of us who are here this morning may still do.

- went to bed at night on most occasions with an absence of peace!

In these last verses Jesus is being very deliberate – remember that for the first part of this passage of scripture nothing was said and now Jesus is speaking...

He is saying – I want everyone around here to understand what I know you know,

<sup>44</sup> Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, - <sup>48</sup> Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

So, he is looking at the woman – but speaking to Simon

- everyone present has seen this unfold – all that took place and now Jesus is reinforcing it.

*Jesus is saying “ I want to say it publicly so that you may hear it and so that all may know. You are the one with your sins forgiven.”*

If Jesus' welcome of the sinner at his feet is a problem, his declaration of the forgiveness of sins is a massive problem! - Because - Only God forgives sin.

What Jesus says to the woman raises the stakes, he proclaims that the woman's sins are forgiven because she has loved much.

Jesus is not saying that the woman's works have saved her.

What he is saying is that the love and forgiveness that have made her feel accepted by God (which we see in the parable) have produced her acts of love. Jesus commends the faith that led to her outpouring of love (v. 50).

<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Luke 7:49

<sup>49</sup> Those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" – remember inner speech depicts the thoughts of the wicked – this time though they are sharing between them their inner thoughts.

<sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

The Pharisees again engage in private thoughts and their theological assessment; they know the significance behind Jesus' statement. They know no ordinary man has the right to forgive sin, so they ask, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"

**This question is key.**

- If Jesus has the authority to forgive sin, then he has the right to reveal how salvation occurs.

Simon was worried about Jesus being a prophet, but Jesus' declaration of forgiveness means he is so much more.

Jesus closes with a declaration that deepens the message. He reassures the woman by telling her, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

With this he turns her earlier expression of love into evidence of saving faith.

Faith has motivated her response of love and humility that was evidenced by all that she did, and that Simon the Pharisee didn't do.

## Conclusion

At no point does Jesus seek to stop the woman and turn her away.

- he doesn't ask her what she is doing when she starts weeping on his feet – drying them with her hair – anointing them with the precious perfume.

Whereas many in the room would have wanted her removed – they were certainly thinking all sort of unloving, ungracious and judgmental things.

### 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 Christian Standard Bible

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, <sup>5</sup>is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs.

- Jesus demonstrates this – the Pharisees very definitely do not.

If you are here this morning and you are someone who goes to bed at night and has no peace – know that the peace this woman experienced is a peace that is available to you.

By recognizing the enormity of your sins, as she did – those things that you think, say and do that are wrong – coming before a holy God and confessing those sins – recognizing that Jesus came to free you from the burden and chains of sin – he living a sinless, perfect life, the spotless lamb of God, he set the perfect example of what it means to live a life that is pleasing, glorifying and honoring of God. He took your sin upon himself, paying the price, he took your place upon the cross to the point of death. On the third day he rose, ascended into heaven, conquered both sin and death and now sits at the right of the father interceding/communicating with God on your behalf.

Please don't leave here this morning without making the decision to place your faith, hope and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ – enabling you to be free and to go in peace.

**Christian** – as you think about the extravagant outpouring of love that this woman demonstrated to Jesus – forsaking all who looked down upon her – recognizing the immensity of her sin – to the point of an overflowing of love and gratitude.

Does your life demonstrate as saving faith out of an expression of love? To God and to others.

Does your Faith motivate an outflow of love and humility that those around you would say – this is someone who loves Jesus as a result of being forgiven a great debt?

Recognizing that it is only God's grace that allows that debt to be removed.

Do you love Jesus unconditionally – giving him your utmost – holding nothing back.

Or are you someone who is at times living your life as Simon the Pharisee?

- Who sees the sin in other people's lives – but not in your own.
- Who judges other people in those moments.
- Do you sleep peacefully at night – or do you wrestle with your guilt – with those things that you need to confess before a Holy God?

If that is the case, I would encourage you to put those things right with God this morning, confess those things and ask for forgiveness and repent, as we prepare to enter into communion. Knowing then that when you approach the throne of grace and partake in communion this morning you can come forward in peace, and in a right relationship with God.