

“Be sinner!” Luke 7:36-8:3

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 Then 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 wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven - for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." 48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:36-50)

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Today we are really blessed. We have this wonderful story from Luke's gospel. When Luke introduces his gospel account he tells that what is going to follow are testimonies of eyewitnesses who were there from the beginning. It seems that this carefully crafted account is one of those testimonies.

I'd propose that we take a careful look at this event and then we'll be able to see what this event means for us today.

One of the Pharisees asked [Jesus] him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

Jesus had just begun His ministry. Here He was - this young rabbi, teaching people and becoming more and more popular. There was this problem with His teaching and behaviour. He accepted sinners, He ate with them, He proclaimed God's forgiveness to

everyone who repented. Regardless of what kind of persons they were, regardless of what they had done. He forgave unconditionally.

According to Jewish Rabbi to receive God's forgiveness and to be restored in relations with God, it required a little more.

First, of course, you had to realize that you have sinned. Then you had to confess your sins. Finally, you had to fix what you had done wrong. Only then you could hope that your sins will be forgiven. And here He is, this young rabbi who forgives unconditionally, not even asking to fix what was done wrong.

We can't know for sure what was the motivation of these Pharisees, but there is something quite shocking between the lines. Something that Luke brings up later. But it is important to notice it right away.

There are rules of hospitality in every culture. If someone comes to us as invited guest we probably would greet him with handshake or hug and invite inside. We'd offer to take of a coat and to take a seat. In Barossa we may even offer our guest some wine, and so on.

There were well known rules of hospitality also at Jesus time. First, if you invited someone, you were supposed to greet him by a kiss. Then to offer a water to wash feet. Usually servants did it. Then to offer olive oil to wash hands. Olive oil served as soap at that time.

We just read that Jesus was invited to this Pharisee's house and none of this was offered to Him. None. It is not something that you could forget accidentally. It would be similar as to invite someone and then, when this person arrives, not to pay any attention to him at all.

Everyone would notice this kind of disrespect. Jesus could just turn around and leave the place, but He didn't. Instead, as we read, He reclined at the table.

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Here it becomes really interesting. All this story assumes that this woman had heard Jesus message already before. She had heard the wonderful news that God accepts everyone and forgives sins of everyone, regardless of who they are. For her this message had a life changing power. We'll see in a minute, why.

Text says that she was a sinner. This is quite unusual description. Think for a minute, what could be woman's occupation if she was identified as a sinner. Right, she was a prostitute in this town. In the culture where to receive the forgiveness of God you need not just repent and confess your sins, but also to make up what you had done wrong.

Let me ask, how could prostitute make up for what she had done? How? Right, there was no way to make things up. What did it mean for her? Very simple – there in no forgiveness, there is no way to restore relations with God, there is no way out of where she was.

Then suddenly there is this new teacher, who says that the Kingdom of God is already among us, repent and believe in the Gospel, that all your sins are forgiven. Not because you deserve it, not because you have merited this forgiveness, but solely because of grace of God. We can see why this message would be life changing for this woman.

Probably she had come to this meal, because she learned that Jesus will be there and she wanted to express her gratitude for the good news she had heard from Jesus. Her heart was overflowing with joy and thanksgiving. Jesus message had changed her life. As she was there she saw everything that happened. This deep disrespect that Pharisees showed to Jesus.

This woman had come carrying a jar with expensive perfume, perhaps, she wanted to anoint Jesus head. Now situation had changed. What could she do to make this situation up for Jesus? She would gladly wash his feet, but no one would give her water and towel to do it.

As we read she began to weep... and here it was – a solution, tears. She approached Jesus and wet His feet with her tears and as she didn't have a towel, she dried His feet by her hair and anointed His feet with her expensive perfume.

Such a scene could seem strange for us, but it had additional meaning for those who were present there. To uncover her hair was quite unacceptable gesture. According to Rabbi, a pious woman could uncover her hair the first time only on wedding night before her husband. Thus she would show that she belongs to him.

For us it is difficult to comprehend in its fullness everything that happened there. Pharisees obviously wanted to offend and humiliate Jesus. The actions of this woman changed the situation. She did much more, showing much larger respect to Jesus than it was usually required.

She washed His feet with her tears, she dried His feet with her hair; that could mean that she pledged her allegiance to Jesus. She poured this expensive perfume on Jesus feet. As some commentators have noticed that could also mean that she was renouncing her previous occupation.

By doing all of this she had ruined Pharisees' plan to humiliate Jesus. Now He had received honour as none of the guest. But by doing this she also had brought a trouble upon herself, as she stood against the will of those who had power in the town. For her it was very costly step.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Jesus had failed Pharisees' test. If He was prophet, according to their thinking, He would not have acted this way.

But we can see something really amazing in Jesus' reaction. According to Jewish understanding, if one wanted to give thanks to God, he was supposed to go to the temple and to bring a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Instead, this woman came with her gratitude directly to Jesus. Besides she expressed her gratitude in such a way that this kind of thanksgiving would be appropriate for God alone.

But Jesus accepted it. He accepted her gratitude. By accepting it Jesus affirmed that she had done the right thing. He affirmed that if she wanted to give thanks to God for the gift of forgiveness, then the right way was to give it to Jesus, and not in the temple. By this Jesus implicitly affirmed that in Him all the glory of God indwelt bodily. That He is the only way we can have an access to God.

[Then] Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

This is a threatening tone. We don't know how Jesus said it, but it could be something like this. 'Now, you, listen, what I'm going to say to you!'

"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly."

When Scriptures speak of a lord who lends money, usually God is presumed to be the referent of these parables. Ultimately we all are responsible before Him. There are several thoughts we could highlight in this parable.

Jesus talked about two debtors, not about one. By this He included in the category of debtors not just the woman who was a sinner, but also Simon, the host. We can say that in a way as Jesus presents it, everyone is a debtor before God. There are two types of debtors. Those, who realize that they are sinners, and those who think that they are not. At least not that much. In the eyes of God, who sees and judges hearts and not faces, we all are the same. All of us.

What Jesus was saying, without going into details, that none of them could pay back their debt. None. It doesn't matter what we think about ourselves, about our life, about our standing before God, His own judgments are sound and clear. We all are sinners, and none of us can repay our debt.

But God is willing to forgive both. Jesus affirmed that He had forgiven the woman. But He also offered the forgiveness to Pharisee Simon. He is ready to forgive both. He has come for the sake of all, and it doesn't matter whether we think that we have sinned a lot, or whether we think that we are pretty decent people. We all are in need of repentance and of forgiveness. Jesus is ready to grant it.

This is of immense importance. Jesus asked: **“Now which of them will love him more?” “The one for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”**

That’s right. If we have only a tiny debt, it really doesn’t matter if it is cancelled or not. Only when our debt is huge, when it is enormous, when we are afraid to look at it because we realize that there is nothing we can do to repay it, only then we can really appreciate the forgiveness.

We want others to think that we are good people. We tend to hide our sins. We know that within family circle we allow ourselves to reveal them more than meeting with friends. But we can hide nothing from God. Nothing. Stop doing it. Stop deceiving ourselves. We don’t have to hide our sins neither from our God, we need to be honest about them. Why?

Here is the rationale. God sees our thought, He sees our hearts. We do show ourselves better than we are to people around us, we even try to deceive ourselves that our debt isn’t that large. But what does it give to us? How large our debt is, how heavy our sins are, all of this will be revealed anyway. All will be put into light. When Christ comes, there will be no place to hide.

Listen carefully what Jesus is saying. We can have a greater joy and greater love towards our Lord only when we understand that our debt, which is enormous, which is huge – is forgiven. It is not that difficult to realize that our debts indeed are huge. Think about these few things?

Do we love our God more than anything? Do we seek His presence? Do we trust Him or other created things to give us joy, security, meaning for our lives? Are we keen to listen to His words, read, learn, meditate upon them? Do we seek Him daily in our prayers? Do we give Him thanks for everything He daily does for us?

Do we raise our children to fear, love and trust God above all things, showing how to do it with our own example? Do we treat people in our lives as ourselves? Do we forgive not just seven, but seventy seven times? Do we deal with material values in our hands as with God’s possession, as His owned and only entrusted to us, or we assume that all of this is mine. Do we daily strive to bring the Gospel of Christ to others? Do we share the Gospel of forgiveness with those whom we meet in our lives, or are we ashamed to talk about our Saviour?

If we don’t do all of this, and much more... then let us admit – our debt is enormous, that’s huge. What could we do, if Christ comes today in His glory and requires to repay it?

Don’t hide this reality from God or from yourselves. Jesus has come to forgive and accept sinners. Sinners, not saints. Don’t try to be saint before God, otherwise Jesus cannot forgive you. Be sinner! Just be honest and bold and admit it.

Bring them before God in your confession, either in the Divine service or in a private confession with your pastor. Because it doesn’t matter how many your sins are,

how dirty your thoughts are, Jesus' forgiveness cleanses them all. Then you can try to be saint, not before God, but serving all people in your lives.

Simon, the host, he had fixed his eyes on the woman's sins. Jesus is totally changing the focus. He changes the focus from the sins in the past, to the response to Jesus message of forgiveness.

He says: 'Look at this woman! Look at her! You have heard my message, Simon, what was your reaction? You wanted to humiliate me. Look at this woman! She also had heard my message, and she responded properly. When she heard my message she repented, she turned away from her old ways, and pledged allegiance to me.' This is what Jesus is after.

Don't try to show that we are not sinners. He knows we are. Be sinner. This is what it means to have Christian faith. Everything begins with honesty. Jesus has come to accept sinners and to eat with them in His feast. Admit that you are one of them, receive the forgiveness, rejoice and respond with love.

When we do it, Jesus doesn't look at what we have done before. It doesn't matter anymore. He doesn't look to our debts. They are forgiven. You are forgiven. All our sins, in deeds, words and thoughts, all that we were supposed to do, but never did, this all is taken away. Jesus says to you: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace!"

Now He waits for our response. He is interested what we are going to do when our debts are forgiven. What we are going to do with our freedom. Let's not disappoint Him. Amen.