

## **“I’ll sit with the prostitute” Luke 7:36-50**

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and 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, 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. 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.” And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” “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.” 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. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven— for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Today I would like to invite you to come together with me to a dinner. I want you to witness what will happen in this dinner. I believe that we all can benefit so much from what we’ll see and hear.

The dinner we are going to attend is taking place in a town in Palestine, where the local intelligence, local spiritual leaders and other local big wigs have gathered together. There is a reason for this dinner.

They want to examine a certain new Teacher, who has become quite popular recently. He travels around spreading His teaching and, to be honest, He doesn’t seem to understand what He is doing.

Everyone knows that God loves those who keep His commandments. Good people. However this Man has been teaching that God accepts everyone and forgives everyone. Honestly, He has been making it look like the holy God welcomes everyone, even the worst sinners, as if they were His beloved children.

More than that, this Guy Himself has been eating and drinking together with tax collectors, prostitutes and others notorious elements. It seems that someone has to show Him His place.

This is what this dinner is about. To bring this Guys in and to show Him His place. Thus “one of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.”

We should stop right here. This is scandalous! What do you do when you invite someone to your house for a dinner? Especially if the guest is quite a prominent person.

Perhaps you would meet them already outside, you would great them and you would kindly invite them in, you may offer them to take off their coat and to offer them welcome drink ... you know all the polite stuff that we usually do.

There were certain things to be done in this dinner as well. In this dinner it would be the responsibility of the host to greet his guests with the kiss of peace, and to offer them water to wash their feet and their hands, and olive oil to anoint their heads and themselves. Olive oil was an analogue of soap and fragrance.

This Pharisee didn’t do any of these things. None! It probably was a part of the plan - to show this young Rabbi His place. If he wanted to insult and to humiliate the young Teacher, then he had done a great job.

But then something else unusual happened. It was a custom in that culture that the oldest and the most important persons were invited to the table first. The guest of honor. But even before anyone was invited to take their places, this young man took the initiative and reclined at the table. What was He stating? Who was He?

When dinners like this took place, they were not closed events, but usually open for the whole community. Anyone could come in and just be around, observing and listening to the conversations.

However, there was one person which really didn’t belong there. Not in that society of good people. She has been watching this young Rabbi since He arrived. He was the reason she actually had come to this dinner. She had met Him already earlier and He had told her something that changed her whole life.

She wasn’t proud of her life. She wasn’t proud of what she had done. She wasn’t proud of how she earned for living. She was selling her body for money. She couldn’t fall much lower.

But then, she had heard about this young Teacher. Then she had gone to see and to listen to Him when He was in the town. He was so different. He had spoken to her kindly. He had treated her with respect. He had said to her that God is her Father and loves her and forgives her anything that she had ever done.

Now she had come with the hope to be again in His presence, and to tell that His words have turned her life around, that she is giving up what she has been doing so

far, she had come to put at Jesus feet the alabaster flask with ointment, token of her profession, as a symbol of her repentance and new life. She had come to hear more of His life changing words, and to see how what He says transforms other people's lives. Instead, she had just witnessed the very opposite.

The most important person in her life was humiliated before her eyes by a group of self-righteous and snobbish men. She would gladly go ahead and wash His feet, but they, of course, wouldn't give her water. She was helpless and angry and tears begun to run down her face.

Here it was, the solution! She will wash His feet with her tears. As thus she did. She just couldn't stop. Gratitude and love for what this man had done for her, anger for injustice and humiliation that she had witnessed, mixed with helplessness and despair for she could do anything – all burst out in this one act.

She wept, tears running down her face, she begun to kiss Jesus feet and wiped them with her hair and anointed them with the ointment. Everyone was watching this highly emotional and very intimate act. Everyone with different thoughts.

“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.”

But, of course, if this young Teacher knew and understood anything He would knew who she was. A prostitute! And this kind of behavior, in public, very sexual in its nature, that is... totally, totally unacceptable!

Then this young Rabbi, Jesus from Nazareth was His name, addressed the thoughts of the rude host. This is scary. He knew Simon's thoughts. He knows your thoughts as well. He knows every single one of your thoughts...

“Simon,” He said, “I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” “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.”

Very simple parable. Very vivid picture. Two debtors. One has much, much bigger debt. But there is something common to both of them. None of them can repay their debt. None. In that they are equal. There is nothing they can do to change their situation.

You see, it doesn't matter to which of these we would liken ourselves, to the one who owes a lot, or to the one who owes just a little. There is nothing we can do to change the situation.

It is the grace of the moneylender that changes everything. His undeserved grace to those who can't repay their debts. We can't repay our debts. We can't erase all the shameful thought and desires, all our rebellion against God's will, we can't call back our angry and hurtful words, we can make disappear all the wrong things we have ever done...

And we certainly can't do anything about all these things that we should have done and said and haven't. We depend on God's grace. It is good to remember – only when we realize that we can't pay our debts on our own, only then we begin to appreciate God's grace.

“Which of the two debtors will love the moneylender more?” Pharisee Simon got it right: “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” Good job, Simon, you got this one right!

When someone insults us, we don't usually go to confrontation. If someone ignores us or tries to humiliate by words or actions, we don't usually speak up about it, we just let it go.

But Jesus didn't. While everyone was listening what He will say, He went ahead without holding back. With this little parable Jesus had set forth the ground for what He wanted to do.

To teach about God's grace and mercy. To stand with those broken by the sinful world, to restore their lives and to give them His peace. Here they were. Two debtors. Simon and the woman.

One who had owed a lot, and the other who still owed to Him. One - repentant. Other – self-righteous and arrogant. Simon had invited Jesus to show Him His place. Now the tables had turned.

“Look here, 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.” What a striking difference! On the one hand, rejection and arrogance, on the other, humility and self-sacrificial service.

“You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.” You didn't do what you were expected to do. She did what she wasn't expected. She did so much more. That was her gratitude that was driving her.

Simon didn't anoint Jesus head with oil, but the woman poured over His feet fragrance from her alabaster flask. Those who have studied the culture of the first century suggest that this alabaster flask was a part of her previous profession.

This flask was where she would carry expensive fragrance to be used while providing her services. Now she had brought this expensive fragrance and poured it lavishly on Jesus feet as gift offering, as a symbol of a new life with Jesus.

In the first century Palestine, if you wanted to give thanks to God for His goodness to you, you would go to the Temple in Jerusalem, where God had promised to be present, and would leave your gift there.

This woman did something different. Perhaps she had realized something that people struggle to comprehend. She brought her gift and came with her devotion to Jesus, and she was right.

That was and is the place where the holy God Himself is present among us, in Jesus. If we want to be in God's presence, we need to go where Jesus is, in the Divine Service, in His Word, in His Holy Meal.

There is this huge difference between forgiven sinner and one who thinks they are fine as they are; as between Simon and the woman. Jesus doesn't look at our outwardly deeds, whatever shiny they may seem to us. He looks at our hearts.

If you think that you are good enough, and there is no need for forgiveness, like Simon did, you still have a heart of stone, frozen and cold, arrogant and self-righteous. Then you still have your debts which you can't pay, but - you don't have the gracious moneylender.

Jesus awaits repentance and gratitude, love and total devotion. Love your God with all your heart, put your life in His hands, for He loved you first and gave up His life so that all your debts could be forgiven. When you are forgiven and you realize it, Jesus gives you a new heart. Heart of flesh and not of stone.

"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven— for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." It is so simple. Repentance leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness to love.

Love of Jesus changes you. You desire nothing but be with Him. To come in His presence. To devote your live to Him. To listen to His life giving words. To receive His blessings. To be with Him. Whatever the cost. Then you prefer to sit at Jesus feet with prostitutes, than to feast at the rich table with Simons.

When Jesus had finished speaking to Simon, He turned again to the woman. Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." She got it again! If you have done things which you are ashamed of, if you have lived a life, which you are not proud of, if

you feel like outcast, even among Christians, then Jesus says to you: “Your sins are forgiven, I am with you.”

If you feel guilty for failing to be good enough, for failing as a parent, or in life in general, or as a spouse, or as a Christian, then know – God’s grace is sufficient. If you have Christ, you have all you may ever need. He stands with you, against anyone who may despise you, exactly as He stood with this prostitute. Forgiving and gracious Lord.

If you think that you are good as Simon the Pharisee thought, then know that Jesus stands and eats and drinks with sinner, with repentant sinners, with those who need His grace. So you better become one of them.

Because if you are a sinner, this is what Jesus says to you: “I stand with you. My Father is your Father. Forget about your failures, forget what the world thinks about you, stop trying to prove that you are somebody, you are precious to me, I am with you, and you will be with me always.”

Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” This is what people sometimes wonder. Who do these people in the Church think they are that they can forgive sins?

The holy God, the Creator of everything, of every living being, He came and dwelled among us as Jesus from Nazareth. With His death He paid all our debts, and after His resurrection He sent His people, ordinary sinners as me and you, to proclaim repentance and to forgive the sins in His name to all people.

For as you hear what He has done, as you repent and rejoice in His forgiveness as the prostitute did, Jesus gives you a new heart. Loving and tender heart. The heart that overflows in gratitude and devotion.

Then Jesus says to you as He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Your faith has saved you. Go in peace, indeed.

Amen.