



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

A Sinner's Grateful Heart...

Luke 7:36-50

^{NIV} **Luke 7:36**...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."

Jesus had been talking to two disciples sent from John the Baptist. Herod Antipas had imprisoned John and it seemed that John had begun to doubt whether Jesus was actually the Messiah. Or it may have been that John's disciples had begun to have doubts about his ministry and perhaps John wanted to point them away from himself and toward Jesus.

Whatever the reason, Jesus gave them a message of reassurance to take to back to John with them and then turned to the crowd and began to speak about John the Baptist. What he said was extraordinary. Jesus reminded the crowd that John the Baptist was a remarkable man. He was, perhaps, the most remarkable man ever.

Jesus' own words were:

^{NIV} **Luke 7:28**...I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

All the people that were listening, even the despised tax-gatherers, agreed with Jesus assessment of John. But the Pharisees and the doctors of the law stood in stony silence. They could not bring themselves to agree with what He said about the Baptist because John had called them reprobates and vipers and the vilest of names. Their own sense of self-righteousness would not allow them to acknowledge John; he had been much too hard on their sinfulness and they simply could not forget.

Of course, Jesus knew all about their obstinacy. They had displayed the same stiff-necked, unrepentant hearts toward Him and He felt compelled to point it out. Jesus turned toward the Pharisees and said:

NIV Luke 7:31..."To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' ³³ For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'

It was a terrible condemnation. If I could paraphrase Jesus' remarks toward the Pharisees, it would be something like this. **"You know there is just no making you happy. You are like kids in the marketplace. Someone plays a happy tune and you say, 'We're not gonna dance to that.' Someone else plays a sad tune and you say, 'No, not that one either.' And you have done the same with John and I. He came telling you to repent because the kingdom of God is near and you said, 'No not that.' I came and told you to rejoice because the kingdom of God is here and you said, 'No not that either.' I tell you the truth; your spiritual blindness is clearly demonstrated by your refusal to respond one way or the other."**

To more clearly illustrate Jesus' charge against the Pharisees and lawyers, Luke then recorded the story we have before us this morning. Apparently, one of the Pharisees in the crowd asked Jesus to dine with Him. I don't know if he felt any conviction based on what Jesus had said or if he felt a need to vindicate the behavior of the other Pharisees. But he asked Jesus to dine with him and amazingly Jesus accepted.

Luke writes in verse 34:

NIV Luke 7:34...The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'"

The invitation was polite but reserved. There were none of the acts of courtesy that were normally extended to so prominent a guest. Luke tells us that they simply gathered around the Pharisee's table. In those days, diners did not sit at tables when they ate. Instead of sitting, they reclined around a short table, usually no more than a foot high. Each diner would prop himself up on a pillow under his left arm with his feet stretched out behind him. They would then reach across and take food with their right hand. It allowed the diners to be face to face and it promoted conversation.

Sometimes hosts would allow spectators to come and observe such meals. Spectators were not invited to eat and were not allowed to participate in the conversation but they were allowed to watch and to learn. Hosts were happy to allow such spectators. It brought them honor and it was often the only way poorer people could hear and observe the occasional, distinguished guest. The problem with opening up such a meal to spectators is that the host sometimes lost control of who actually got into the meal. I'm fairly sure that's what happened to this particular Pharisee. Luke tells us:

^{NIV} **Luke 7:37**...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.

She was a pitiful woman. She had been a trollop, really not much more than a smut-faced gutter rag. She had known men, lots of men. That is almost certainly implied in the statement that she was a **"sinner"**. It was a phrase often used with regard to women of loose virtue.

She was not the kind of woman this Pharisee would have ever invited to his home. From the moment she entered the door, I'm sure there were nervous whispers and disapproving stares. Probably more than one or two of the men quietly excused themselves, for even the slightest nod of recognition would have destroyed their reputation. But they were safe enough. In fact, the woman was oblivious to the others in the room. She had heard that Jesus was there and to her that was all that mattered.

We don't know when it happened but we do know that somewhere along the way she had already met Jesus. She had heard Him speak of forgiveness and cleansing and knowing the wickedness of her own depraved life she had cast her last, best hope on Him. With it she had cast all of her moral failure, all of her corruption and wretched sinfulness. And as she had come to understand something of her liberation from the penalty of sin; she also came to understand something of her liberation from the power of sin. She was not perfect but she was forgiven and the more she thought on that the more her heart swelled with alternate feelings of shame and joy.

And then she he had heard that Jesus was at Simon's house. She gathered up her most prized possession. It was a small bottle of the most costly perfume money could buy. She had rushed to Simon's house not really knowing what she would do when she got there but desperate to express to Jesus something, maybe just a small token, of her love and gratitude.

And there he was.

He was reclining at the table with His dusty feet stretched out behind Him. She made her way around the outside of the banquet room and finally she stood quite alone at His feet when the great fountains of her emotion began to burst open. As she cried, her tears rolled down her cheeks and fell onto His feet. She was embarrassed but she couldn't stop. She dropped to her knees to wipe away her tears and as she did she became completely undone. She began to kiss his feet. Desperately trying to wipe the tears from His feet with her hair, each new move of her head deposited even more tears. She began to kiss His feet. She was locked into what seemed to the onlookers an endless, histrionic cycle of kisses, tears and wiping, kisses, tears and wiping. She knew she was a mess; she feared being cast out even though no one approached her. She broke the top off the bottle of perfume and began to anoint Jesus feet.

The conversation stopped. No one moved or spoke. Jesus looked straight ahead at Simon and Simon, with mouth agape, looked back at Jesus. Then Luke does something that only a writer under the inspiration of the Spirit of God could ever do. He tells us what Simon was thinking.

^{NIV} **Luke 7:39**...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."

Sitting there with the crowd drawn to the actions of this known sinner, Simon looked into the eyes of our Savior and thought to himself. **"Sir, I do not know who you are. I do not even know who you think you are. But this one thing I know. You're no prophet. If you were, you would not allow this woman, this woman in particular, to handle you in such a manner."**

Jesus, of course, knew exactly what Simon was thinking but He didn't reprove him. Instead, the text says he told Simon a story and then He asked Simon to draw a conclusion.

^{NIV} Luke 7:40...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?"**

To help rightly understand the story, I need to tell something about a denarius. A denarius was a small coin that generally represented the amount of pay a laborer could earn in one day. What Jesus asked Simon to decide was who would be most grateful, a person forgiven a debt equal to fifty days pay or a person forgiven a debt equal to 500 days pay. The answer was as obvious to Simon as it is to us though he was reserved in the way he gave the answer.

^{NIV} Luke 7:43...Simon replied, "**I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.**" "**You have judged correctly,**" Jesus said.

It was only then that Jesus made the application for Simon. That application occurs in verse 44.

^{NIV} Luke 7:44-47 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."**

Jesus turned and pointed to the woman at His feet. **“Do you see this woman, Simon? You gave me no water to wash my feet when I came into your house. You and I know that that is just a minimum courtesy but you didn’t offer it. This woman, on the other hand, has not stopped washing my feet and she has done so out of the genuine affection of her heart. You gave me no kiss of greeting but this woman has not stopped kissing my feet. You offered me no oil to anoint my head but she has not stopped anointing my feet with her perfume, perfume that has costs her all she has. Do you know why that is Simon? It is because her sins, which are many, have been forgiven. A person forgiven much loves much. You on the other hand you love me very little. Why is that do you think?”**

Then our Lord turned to the woman.

^{NIV} **Luke 7:48...** Then Jesus said to her, **“Your sins are forgiven.”**

“Sister, your sins have been forgiven.” How wonderful that must have sounded to this poor, pitiful sinner. Years of reproach, years of shame, years of stubborn rebellion were just all washed away. She knew it already, of course, but to hear it, to hear it again produced in her soul an infinite reservoir of devotion and gratitude. She was grateful to Jesus for her deliverance and no measure of rejection or mockery from those who suspected the reality of her conversion would ever wash away that gratitude.

She was filled with gratitude but the Pharisees and lawyers listening were not. They were shocked. Luke tells us what they were thinking.

^{NIV} **Luke 7:49**...The other guests began to say among themselves, "**Who is this who even forgives sins?**"

"Who does He think He is?" they wondered. **"Doesn't He know that only God can forgive sins? We don't know what tune He is playing but we are not going to dance to it."**

But Jesus ignored them and He turned again to the woman.

^{NIV} **Luke 7:50**...Jesus said to the woman, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**"

It was not that Jesus was saying that the woman's faith was meritorious. We know from the rest of Scripture that that was never the case. Our righteousness, even at its best and most noble, is nothing more than filthy rags before a Holy God. It was not the quantity of her faith that saved her, nor was it the quality; it was the object of her faith that saved her. She had placed her hope in Jesus, whom she deemed to be her last best hope and she was right to do. But in forgiveness she found Him to be more than her last, best hope. She found Him to be her one true hope.

And the scent of her offering and her genuine worship filter down through the centuries reminding us anew about the kind of gratitude we too should feel toward Him who saved us and called us with a holy calling. And it is to that gratitude that I want to address myself for the next few moments.

One of the questions that I have been asked most often in my years of ministry is, **"How do I know that I am a genuine believer?"**

It is a good question and worthy of at least a few minutes of our time. To answer it rightly, I must ask a question in return. **“What do you think of Jesus?”** It is perhaps the most important question you can ever ask yourself. And there is no better time to ask it. What do think when you hear His name? Does it stir within you genuine feelings of love and affection? Are you moved when you hear His name? I am not talking about some sort of shallow, nostalgic emotionalism either. Nor am I talking about the same kind of warm feelings that fill our minds when we think of the Christmas memories of our childhood. I am talking about the kind of genuine affection that stirs you deep in your soul. If your answer is **“No, not that”**, you have already answered your own question. If, on the other hand, your answer is **“Yes, I do possess a genuine affection for Him, but I want it to be more. How can I more rightly think of Him?”** If that is your answer, then I have a word from the Lord for you. We cannot work up in ourselves the genuine affection for Christ that we ought to have. The only way we can grow in our affection of Him is to consider the depth of our own sin and to consider how He has redeemed us from that sin. The only way we can love Him rightly is to rightly understand the nature of the wrath we were once under and to now understand our position as His adopted beloved children. It’s the same old story of guilt, grace, and gratitude. It is the contrast between the two things, our sin and our salvation, that allow us to possess the genuine affection we ought.

Sometimes God allows the full realization of our forgiveness to come over us in waves as it did with this woman and we lose all sense of decorum. Our hearts feel as if they might burst within us. It has even happened to a grizzled old sinner like me.

Once when I was in seminary, my mission's class visited a Hare Krishna temple. It was a real eye opener for me. I sat there barefooted, huddled on the floor, with the rest of the seminarians listening to their teacher expound Krishna theology. But I hardly paid him any attention. My mind was focused on the kids sitting around the temple. They sat with their strange haircuts and stranger clothes quietly doodling in their coloring books. My heart was filled with compassion, not for the adults, but for the kids that were being brought up in the fear and admonition of demons. They should have been studying the stories of the Patriarchs and the prophets. They should have been hearing the wonderful stories of our Savior but instead they were having the hope of eternal life systematically snuffed out of their lives. My thoughts turned to my own wife and children and how God had miraculously delivered us from our own sin and corruption. Through His own good providence, He had brought us to a saving understanding of Christ's work. And then my heart was filled with love for Christ and all that He had done for me and mine. I was undone in a torrent of tears and of gratitude. I am sure the Krishna's thought, **"Boy, these Presbyterians are nuts."**

I raced home. For a while, I kissed my wife harder, hugged my children longer, read my Bible slower and prayed more fervently than I ever had. The sky seemed bluer, food tasted better and life was actually life more abundant. My affections for all that was around me had not really increased; it was the realization of all that Christ had done for me and mine that drove me. Of course, I felt shame for all my moral failures. But the more I thought about them, the more I thought about Christ's redeeming work and the more I loved Him.

If you have no idea what I'm talking about, I am afraid you may be in the camp of the Pharisees and lawyers and that your heart may be telling you what you already know, **"No, not that. No, no that either."** If that is the case, I can tell you with Augustine, **"Brother, you have not yet rightly considered your sin."** Ask God to enlighten your mind. Ask God to renew your heart. Ask God to draw you to Christ and His redeeming work and then come and join us as we seek to render to Him all the genuine love and gratitude that is His due.

If you can understand what I am saying, you have the proper sense of how this poor wretched woman felt standing at Jesus' feet. Your heart may be warmed and gain with affection for Christ. If that is so, I encourage you to express your renewed devotion to Him by committing yourself again to live in gratitude. Let gratitude shine forth in your singing, your giving, your prayers, your worship and your love for the gospel. Let it shine forth in your renewed moral resolve.

Let it shine forth as you commune with Christ in the sacraments. Now, in a moment, after a period of reflection, we are going to receive the sacrament. It is a time of communion for believers and their Savior. If you are a believer, duly baptized and a member of an evangelical church where they preach the gospel and honor the Scripture as God's Holy Word, we say come and welcome. If you are a baptized believer, earnestly seeking a place to worship, we say come and welcome.

But if you have never placed your faith in Christ or you have never followed Christ in baptism we would ask you to refrain from the partaking. Instead, we ask that you use this opportunity to cast yourself on Christ and His wonderful mercy. Now having said that I want to tell you a story. It is a true story.

There was a poor simple boy who was supported by his parish in the Highlands of Scotland. This boy passed his time wandering from house to house. He was a quiet boy and peaceable and his simple ways won the pity of all the kind hearts in the village. He had little ability when it came to making conversation with his fellow men but he seemed often to be in conversation with His Heavenly Father, a father who is prone to condescend to such men of low estate.

The boy's name was Yeddie and he was in the habit of whispering to himself as he trudged along the highway or performed the simple tasks, which everyone in the village felt the freedom to demand of him. One day one of the boys in the village heard Yeddie praying earnestly and so he asked, **"What ghost or goblin are you begging favors of now, Yeddie?"**

"Neither the one nor the tither, laddie," he replied; I was just having a few words with Him that neither yourself nor I can see, and yet with Him that sees the both of us!"

One day Yeddie presented himself in his coarse dress and simple manners before the minister, and making an enormous bow said, **"Please, minister, let poor Yeddie eat supper on the coming day with the Lord Jesus."** The minister was busy preparing for the observance of the Lord's Supper, which in that thinly settled region was celebrated quarterly and by several churches together, so that the large group of communicants made it necessary to hold the services in the open air. The minister was too busy to be disturbed by the simple boy and so he tried, gently, to put him off. But Yeddie pleaded, **"Oh minister, if ye but kenned how I love Him, ye wud let me go and sit at His table."** This so touched the minister's heart that permission was given. As the service proceeded, tears

flowed down Yeddie's cheeks and at the name of Jesus he would shake his head mournfully and whisper, **"But I dinna see Him."** At length, however, after partaking of the bread and wine, he raised his head and wiped away the traces of his tears and looking in the minister's face, nodded and smiled. Then he covered his face with his hands and buried it between his knees till the parting blessing was given and the people began to scatter. He then rose and with a face lighted with joy and yet with solemnity, he followed the rest.

Finally, some of the boys of the church pressed him about the service and Yeddie spoke. **"Ah, lads, do not bid Yeddie talk today. I have seen the face of the Lord Jesus among His own. I got a smile from His eye and a word from His lips and I'm afeared to speak lest I lose the memory of it. Ah, lads, lads, I have seen Him this day that I never seed before. I have seen wi' these dull eyes the savior, and what a lovely Savior He is."**

That, my friends, is a picture of a sinner's grateful heart.

Let's pray.

¹ "Yon Lovely Man" Story of Simple Yeddie The Wicket Gate Magazine "A Continuing Witness". Internet Edition number 38 – placed on line September 2002