

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 2, 2016
20th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 17:5-10, 2 Corinthians 7:6-10
Hymns: 2; 324:1-6; 342; 377:10 (238:3-5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50

“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, “This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.”

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’

So he said, ‘Teacher, say it.’

41 ‘There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?’

43 Simon answered and said, ‘I suppose the one whom he forgave more.’

And He said to him, ‘You have rightly judged.’ 44 Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her

head. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.'

48 Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

49 And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'

50 Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.' ” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: What does the name of Jesus mean to you?

We live in a society where it is nearly impossible to believe that there is anyone who hasn't heard Jesus' name, or even spoken Jesus' name! But then one must pause and consider what that means. So many of the people that hear and speak Jesus' name do so with little or no thought. They just use it as a part of their speech pattern. They say the Lord's name or express surprise with God's name in every other sentence, but do they think even for a moment who the Lord is, and what He means to them?

Sadly many of those who use the Lord's name so casually profess to be Christians and should know better, but many and I would hope most of these who are so cavalier with the Lord's name don't really understand who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for them in the greatness of His love. Far too many people don't have a clue concerning their need for Jesus and understanding who He is, and what He has done for them.

So we see this contrast fully displayed in our text during Jesus' public ministry among the Jews. Nearly everyone was familiar with Jesus' name, and had heard the stories of the miracles He had done and the reports concerning the wonder of Jesus' teaching, but

so many failed to comprehend Jesus' real identity. So the Spirit presents this event for our instruction in --

--

THEME: Relating to Jesus.

Our text demonstrates that that relating to Jesus involves more than --

I. Outward Appearances.

The thing about outward appearances is that they are outward. What other people see may not always be representative of what is going on in the heart. A human interpretation can spin what is being done so that what is socially acceptable is seen as good and what is odd or unusual or peculiar, is seen as just that, and is found to be unacceptable or even disgusting.

So it is that a man named Simon, a prominent member of Jewish society, invited Jesus to dinner at his home. Simon was a Pharisee. We have been trained to think "bad guy" when we hear the word Pharisee, but that was not at all the case in those days. Pharisees were highly respected with stellar reputations because of their assiduous fulfillment of the law. To be invited to Simon's house was seen as a high honor. He was exactly the sort of man others would think Jesus should associate with. Outward appearances would indicate that this Simon was relating to Jesus in a good way.

But then that strange thing happened. This woman just walked right into the dining room; I mean she just walked right in, and walked right up to where Jesus was reclined at table, and this was not just any woman, but a woman with a reputation, and not like Simon the Pharisee's reputation. For all the gall! And then she started to do something with Jesus. She knelt at His feet; she was carrying on crying and her tears were falling on Jesus' feet. And she had let her hair down! She had let her hair down **in public!** She used her hair to dry Jesus' feet! She was cleaning the dust off Jesus' feet with her hair. She had this fancy alabaster box with her and she opened it and poured fragrant oil on Jesus' feet. The dinner guests would have been shocked! By all appearances this was not only most unusual, but violating every social norm. How dare that woman even show her face in respectable company! By all

appearances this was hardly the way one ought to relate to a respected rabbi like Jesus!

Simon the Pharisee was impressed by appearances. He was no true friend of Jesus. Why he had invited Jesus to his home was most likely to watch Jesus, and to be critical. That is exactly what we see. The Holy Spirit reveals Simon's thoughts: **“This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner”** (v.39).

It is easy for us to see Simon's error. He was critical of Jesus for allowing this sinful woman, this gutter trash, to touch Him! Simon's relationship with Jesus was lacking understanding of Jesus' true role in reaching out to sinners, in saving sinners!

It is easy for us to think that we would never fall into such grievous error, and yet we need be on our guard for this very thing. While we have a better understanding of Jesus than Simon the Pharisee possessed, we also have a natural inclination to look down upon those who are grievous sinners. We rightly know that we are not to associate with sinners in their sin. The Scriptures teach us that **“Evil company corrupts good habits”** (1 Corinthians 15:3). It is one easy step to think that such people are not the kind of people who should be brought into the church; that we are looking for a better class of people. This is such a pernicious error that it truly reveals our own prejudice and our own failure to love. And it happens at an almost subconscious level. By nature we are no better than Simon the Pharisee.

This reveals that we need the Lord's instruction in --

II. Discerning the Measure of God's Grace.

Jesus knows the hearts with all its thoughts and intents. He knows this about us as well as He did Simon the Pharisee, and the sinful woman who knelt at His feet. Jesus responded with a parable regarding debt and its forgiveness. Jesus addressed this parable to Simon, describing a situation where a moneylender had two separate debtors. The one owed fifty denarii. That isn't exactly an insignificant debt. For a common laborer in those days that would be about seven weeks wages. It would not be an easy debt to pay if it were suddenly due and demanded. However, the other debtor in

Jesus' parable owed five hundred denarii, which would be about sixteen **months'** wages for the common laborer. For most people making a subsistence living that would be an overwhelming burden of debt. However, in the parable both debts were freely and totally forgiven. Jesus asked a simple question of Simon which of those debtors would love the creditor more? Simon responded with obvious answer, the one to whom the greater debt was forgiven. Jesus responded in the affirmative; "You have rightly judged."

This parable is all about discerning the measure of God's grace. To do that we need to comprehend the debt we owe to God. Of course it is not a monetary debt as in the parable. It is a great debt of **sin** that we owe to God. Knowing and understanding our sin is important. But then we don't always perceive the true level of our indebtedness. We dismiss much of our sin as not being truly sinful. Little things like driving too fast, or gossiping, or coveting, or using that occasional bad word, or lusting (just a bit) after an attractive woman, or holding a grudge against another person, or hating our enemy, or blowing off church, and neglecting prayer. We minimize these things as being "normal behavior, not especially sinful. In our minds we minimize our personal indebtedness to God. What we read in our Old Testament lesson is most certainly true. "**The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked**" (Jeremiah 17:9). That is why we need the law. The debt is there and it will be required of us unless it is forgiven!

Do we comprehend the true measure of our indebtedness to God? Simon didn't. The sinful woman did. Yes, she was a **sinful** woman, very likely a harlot, and everybody knew **her** sin! Everyone would make sure that she knew her sin! And her conscience was rightly burdened. If we know our sin then we also will understand that our conscience will be burdened.

Then we come to the measure of God's grace in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul knew it for himself, and appreciated it for himself first, and then to share it with others. Paul wrote:

1 Timothy 1:14-15 "And the grace of our Lord was **exceedingly** abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a

faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

As we are brought to realize the full debt of our sin, we confess our sin and unworthiness right along with the Apostle Paul and we express our wonder at the amazing grace of God. The hymn-writer Johann Olearius expressed this wonder for us with these words:

“Oh, how great is thy compassion, Faithful Father, God of grace,
That with all our fallen race, And in our deep degradation
Thou wast merciful that we Might be saved eternally.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 384:1)

From this wonder we realize not a debt of sin, but a --

III. A Debt of Love.

That was Jesus' lesson drawn from the parable and applied to Simon and the unnamed sinful woman.

Luke 7:44-48 Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.’ 48 Then He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

Now it is revealed for us exactly how superficial Simon the Pharisee's relation to Jesus was. He didn't even extend to Jesus that culture's common courtesy in receiving a house guest. He hadn't even offered Jesus water to wash the dust off His feet. This woman whom all the dinner guests looked down upon, she washed Jesus' feet with her tears. She anointed Jesus' feet with fragrant oil. She made her love and adoration for the Lord so obvious that it should have been appreciated by all, and it certainly was by the Lord Jesus. He also appreciated exactly why this woman related to Him so warmly with love. She had found release from guilt and shame. She had found in Jesus the love and the pardoning grace that dismissed her guilt and condemnation. Now her burdened

conscience was at peace. She was not mistaken. Her faith would not be put to shame. Jesus confirmed **“Your sins are forgiven!”** She felt and expressed a great debt of love to Jesus, a debt that she would cheerfully repay for the rest of her life for the great favor He had shown her in forgiving her that debt of sin.

And so, by the grace of God the Holy Spirit it shall be for us also. Through faith we know and relate to Jesus as our Redeemer God, our Savior and the Prince of Peace. Through faith in Christ Jesus we have been forgiven our debt of sin, and our consciences are now at peace. Through faith in Christ we know joy and gladness that overwhelms all the hardships and burdens of this life. We relate to Jesus as our Savior Lord and gladly, freely, readily seek to serve Him and devote our lives to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. And time and again, in spite of the failings of our sinful flesh, Jesus reassures us and tells us in clear certain terms, **“Your sins are forgiven.”**

So we see how --

Conclusion: Relating to Jesus includes knowing exactly who He is.

That was still something the guests at that dinner at Simon’s house still struggled with.

Luke 7:49-50 And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ 50 Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’ ”

They didn’t connect all the dots. They couldn’t make sense of all that Jesus said and did. Man cannot by his own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ ... or come to Him; so Luther taught us to confess in the explanation to the Third Article. What we see at that dinner so it is in life. People cannot properly relate to Jesus apart from faith. They don’t even comprehend the grace of the forgiveness of sins. Mankind as a whole still looks to man’s own righteousness to atone for sin, and in that there is no peace.

That was not the case for the sinful woman. By Jesus’ decree she was at peace! Her sins were taken away even as the Prophet Isaiah presents the declaration of God’s grace: **“Though your sins are as**

scarlet they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). And so we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Even as this woman was assured of the forgiveness that was hers through faith even so we also are assured that we have forgiveness and peace through faith in Christ Jesus. We relate to Jesus as the Christ the Son of God who has redeemed us from all sin. Our debt is paid we are at peace. So we rejoice with the hymn-writer Leopold Lehr:

“Oh draw us ever unto Thee,
Thou Friend of sinners, gracious Savior;
Help us that we may fervently
Desire Thy pardon, peace, and favor.
When guilty conscience doth reprove,
Reveal to us Thy heart of love.
May we, our wretchedness beholding,
See then Thy pardoning grace unfolding
And say: ‘To God all glory be:
My Savior, Christ, receiveth me.
My Savior, Christ, receiveth me.’” (The Lutheran Hymnal 386:5)

AMEN.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will *keep* your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)