

Showing Gratitude  
Luke 7:36-8:3  
Colebrook Congregational Church  
June 12, 2016 / 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost / Proper 6C/Ordinary 11C

Last week's selection came from the beginning third of the Luke's seventh chapter, and today's is from the last third. The portion skipped over is a comparison between Jesus and John the Baptist. The verses just before our selection mention how John the Baptist was an ascetic, frequently fasting; and Jesus is condemned as a glutton, a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

This is immediately followed by a story of Jesus being invited to a meal where He lets a sinner wash His feet.

Each gospel has a version of Jesus being anointed, but they all go in different directions, reflecting the focus of the gospel writer. And Luke focuses on Jesus' concern for the social and religious outcasts.

We start with a Pharisee, we later learn his name is Simon, inviting Jesus to a meal at his house. Jesus' preaching is actually pretty close to the teachings of the Pharisees so it is not inconceivable that He would be friendly enough with one to share a meal with one. Luke describes Jesus doing so three times in his Gospel.

To review, the Pharisees were a political party, a social movement, and a school of thought. After the Destruction of the Second Temple, the Pharisees evolved into Rabbinical Judaism, which is the mainstream Judaism today.

Back to the story, they were in an unnamed city, which was probably Capernaum, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The sins of the woman are not identified, probably so that we can see ourselves in her place in this situation. Upon hearing that Jesus was there having a meal, she bought an alabaster jar with ointment in it, and headed over to Simon's house to anoint Jesus.

Now, a private dinner in ancient Palestine could be seen more like public entertainment, so uninvited guests appearing among them was not uncommon. Jesus and the other guests would have removed their shoes upon entering, and meals back then were eaten while reclining, with feet stretched out and away from the table. Those customs made it easy for the sinner to get in to the house, up to Jesus, and then to start doing things to His feet.

The sinner is not overtly described as penitent, but one can assume remorse from her weeping and other actions. Even so, when Simon saw this happen, he is taken aback. He had assumed that Jesus was a prophet, and so he thinks that Jesus has failed to discern that the woman was a sinner. Simon doesn't say anything aloud, but Jesus knows what Simon was thinking, and starts to talk to him about it, showing that He not only discerned who the woman was, but also Simon's thoughts.

Jesus tells Simon, and presumably the others around the table, the Parable of the Two Debtors. The original context of many of Jesus' parables are lost, and it is obvious that this Parable doesn't quite fit the situation. The Parable tells us that a debtor's gratitude will be proportional to the debt that the creditor canceled. Nothing in the story before or after the Parable suggests that the woman's emotions as she anointed Jesus' feet were those of gratitude for an earlier assurance of forgiveness. In fact, God's forgiveness was the result of the woman's love, not its occasion.

Switching back to the Story, Jesus contrasts Simon, the Pharisee and His host, with the woman, a sinner. Simon had not given Jesus any special courtesy: No water for his feet, nor kiss of welcome, nor anointment of the head. Jesus is treated as a casual guest or a social inferior. The sinner, on the other hand, lavishes upon Jesus evidence of her love.

The first half of the forty-seventh verse is the lesson of the Story, where the woman's sins are forgiven because she has great love. Love is the qualification for divine forgiveness. The second half of that verse ties in the lesson of the Parable, creating a literary chiasmus. A person who is forgiven little, loves little.

An analysis of the text reveals that Luke has interwoven two traditions. The Parable of the Two Debtors has been inserted into a story of Jesus being anointed by a sinner. The Story delivers the message that who loves much is forgiven much; while the Parable's message is that who is forgiven much, loves much. Even though it is obvious that the Story and the Parable are two separate things, Luke wants us to take them as a single unit.

What we see from it, taken as a single unit, is that love is an integral component to forgiveness. Before receiving forgiveness, our penitence has a degree of love in it, causing the feelings of remorse, and containing an element of hope, driving away any despair we may feel. And after receiving forgiveness, there is the awareness of God's grace & love for us, and we respond with acts of gratitude. Back then, there was sacrifice, ointments, and feet washing. Today, we sing hymns of praise, we worship, and we perform acts of love for our neighbors.

All that is about divine forgiveness. But what about earthly forgiveness in our daily lives?

Kyla recently told me about a very well reviewed barbecue place in Hartford, called Bear's Smokehouse. They employ over eighty people, and half of them have a criminal record. The owner, a Navy veteran & competitive eater, said that we all know people, maybe within our own families, who have made mistakes, and if someone doesn't take a chance, the cycle will just keep repeating.

He took a chance with one, and then more, noticing that they worked very hard, out of gratitude, and have helped to make his restaurant a success.

Like the sinner who showed devotion to Jesus, and received forgiveness, the former convicts employed by Bears Smokehouse devote themselves to their work, and have a received a second chance.

No one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. But we can be assured of God's grace and love, that if we are truly penitent, and show love & devotion, that we will be forgiven. We must remember to continue to show love and devotion towards God in our gratitude, but we must do the same for our neighbors. When we are wronged, if who wronged us is penitent, we should be as forgiving as Jesus is. Like we all said together, earlier in this service, in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer,

Gracious God, we thank you for the examples the penitent sinner and the two debtors. May they inspire and guide us whenever we need to seek forgiveness and when we find ourselves in the position of being able to forgive others. And help us to remember to show proper gratitude when we receive Your forgiveness. Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

God of mercy and healing, You who hear the cries of those in need, receive these petitions of Your people that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage.

Holy & Gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of life and for all the blessings of this life, for family and friends, and for love abundant. Bless us this day with Your steadfast love as we declare our trust in You.

Happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven, whose transgressions are no longer held against them. We lay before You all that is weighing us down, so that we can be freed from its burden, and receive God's mercy and love. Continue to guide us in the way we should go, and watch over us.

Be with those who are distraught, those who cannot sleep, those who know not peace and seek it, those who are in need, and those who are unwell in mind, body, or spirit. Help us to comfort them with Your abundant Love. Bless the services of all Your people, and assure them that You are pleased with their work.

We pray that You help lead us through our own trials, the sufferings and sorrows, the challenges and struggles, and back to Your Love. Fill us with hope, sustained in Your mercy, giving us guidance through Your Word, and stamina through Your Spirit.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, heal our lives, that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds and offer you thanks from generation to generation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Luke 7:36-8:3

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him--that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing 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 were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the 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."

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

## Psalm 32

32:1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

32:2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

32:3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

32:4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

32:5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

32:6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

32:7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah

32:8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

32:9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

32:10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

32:11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.