



Grace Lutheran Church
Valentine, NE

MAIL MINISTRY

Trinity 11

August 12, 2018

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 27

Hymns: 244; 324; 46

Scripture Readings: Daniel 9:15-19
Romans 8:33-39

Topic: Faith; Forgiveness; God's Kingdom

In the Name of Jesus!

Text: Luke 7:36-50

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him (Jesus) to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 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, 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. 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." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." 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. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 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." Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

In Christ Jesus, whose kingdom we pray comes to each of our hearts, dear fellow redeemed:

How close are you to God? Our individual answers may well vary, with some of us suggesting we are pretty close to God, while others might feel quite distant from God. Those answers may well reflect our spiritual reality—our faith or lack thereof. However, permit me to reverse the question: how close is God to you? There, too, our initial answers may vary—some believing God is close, while others suggest God is distant. Yet, those answers do not necessarily reflect our spiritual reality, for the Bible clearly reveals that God is omnipresent, that is, present everywhere. David states this in the Psalms: *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."* (Psalm 139:7-10) God is always close to each of us, no matter how we feel, by virtue of His very nature! God is so close to us, that the apostle Paul informs us: *"In Him we live and move and have our being!"* (Acts 17:28)

The spiritual reality for everyone is that God is up-close-and-personal with them, whether they know or not, whether they believe it or not! His desire is that everyone comes to know and rejoice in this spiritual reality. The Bible assures us: *"God our Savior...desires all men to be saved*

and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3b-4) Let us consider these thoughts, therefore, especially as they apply to Jesus' work among us. Let us do so on the basis of the incident described in our text, which reminds us that **JESUS' KINGDOM WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL! He wants us to repent of our sins. He wants us to understand the nature of our salvation. He wants us to experience the peace He alone provides!**

I.

The incident in our text took place during the early part of Jesus' ministry. He had been in Judea near the Jordan River as His ministry had begun. After King Herod had arrested John the Baptizer, however, Jesus had moved north to Galilee. He called His twelve disciples to follow Him and had begun preaching to increasingly larger crowds of people. He had preached His "Sermon on the Mount." He had performed many miracles, even raising a widow's son from the dead at Nain. There had been some initial negative encounters with the Pharisees over some of Jesus' healing miracles performed on the Sabbath, but Jesus was still seen as a rising star by most observers, and many people, including many Pharisees, wanted to hear what He had to say and be seen in His company. Consequently, Jesus was invited to a meal at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Interestingly, He was not treated by Simon as an honored guest, but more of that later.

It was during that meal that a woman of poor reputation in the community, no doubt a prostitute, entered the room where the dinner guests were reclining and stood at Jesus' feet. She was crying and her tears fell on Jesus' feet. She stooped down, wiped his feet with her hair, kissed His feet, and then anointed them with a fragrant oil contained in an alabaster flask. It was certainly an unusual action and, no doubt, created a rather awkward situation for the other guests at the table. Yet, awkward or not, the woman's presence demonstrates that **JESUS' KINGDOM WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL!**

Jesus did not pull His feet away from this strange woman, but rather observed her, then defended her, and ultimately explained her actions as fruit flowing from a forgiven and loving heart. You see, Jesus came into this world to become the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29), but He did not come into this world to save faceless, nameless people. No, He came into this world to save unique individuals—specific people like you and me created by God and redeemed through His blood. He is not interested in our past, except that it pains Him that our sinful pasts cause us and others so much hurt and sorrow. Rather, He is interested in our present and our future. He calls upon each of us right now to repent of our sins—to recognize how our sins have offended our God. His desire is that we turn away from those sins and embrace Him by faith, for thereby we will find help for our souls and healing for our lives. He wants us to trust in His promise, that as "*we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 John 1:9).

This is what that sinful woman did prior to searching Jesus out that day. Perhaps she had heard Him preach. Perhaps she had seen Him perform some or many of His miracles. We do not know, but we do know that she had repented of her sins and was placing her trust in Jesus for forgiveness. It was this knowledge that moved her to take the risk of approaching Him in public and expressing her love so openly. Yes, **JESUS' KINGDOM WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL! He wants us to repent of our sins.**

II.

He also wants us to understand the nature of our salvation. As this situation developed in his dining room, Simon said absolutely nothing. His thoughts, however, were racing and primarily in the wrong direction. He thought: "*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.*"

Jesus, who is so much more than a mere human "*prophet,*" read Simon's mind and took this opportunity to teach him a very important lesson. He told Simon a parable: "*There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?*" Simon answered correctly, although perhaps a bit grudgingly: "*I suppose the one whom*

he forgave more.” Jesus, then turning and pointing to the woman explained: *“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. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 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.”*

What was the point of Jesus’ parable and explanation? Was it simply intended to put Simon in his place; to expose him publicly as a poor host? No, I think not. **JESUS’ KINGDOM WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL**, and it is always intended to reach out to individuals and draw them closer. His purpose was not to humiliate Simon, but rather to instruct him. Jesus wanted Simon to understand the true nature of salvation. Simon was a Pharisee. The Pharisees taught that people were justified by keeping the law of Moses and observing the myriad of man-made rules he and his fellow Pharisees imposed upon the general population. But that is not how anyone is saved! The creditor in the parable *“freely forgave both”* debtors. That creditor is God, who has freely forgiven each of us our sins—great and small, many or few!

My dear friends, this is a lesson Jesus wants us all to learn, for by nature we too think in terms of work-righteousness. We are surrounded by such thinking in the world in which we live. “Good things are supposed to happen to good people, while bad things should happen to bad people!” That is the natural world’s view of justice. But *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.... For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!”* (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21) That, thank God, is heaven’s wisdom, for in spite of our best attempts, even as in the case of Simon, we could never make up for our sins. **JESUS’ KINGDOM WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL**, however, and as with the case of the woman, you and I have come to understand the nature of our salvation!

III.

Finally, **Jesus wants us to experience the peace He alone can provide!** After addressing Simon, Jesus turned His attention to the woman at His feet. He said to her: *“Your sins are forgiven.”* Many of the other guests in that room began muttering their objections: *“Who is this who even forgives sins?”* Jesus’ attention, however, was focused on the woman, and He went on to say: *“Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”*

The blessed fruit of God’s grace is always peace! That is why the apostle Paul would later begin so many of his epistles with a reference to “grace” and to “peace.” Grace was the attitude of God which moved Him to send Jesus to be our Savior. Jesus’ work of redemption yields for us that blessed gift of peace—an absolute peace with God and, we pray, a growing peace with each other. Jesus had told His disciples on Maundy Thursday evening: *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* (John 14:27) The world speaks of peace and offers its hand in peace, but never in any absolute sense. The peace Jesus provides, as Paul would later express, *“surpasses all (human) understanding”* and it is intended to *“guard (y)our hearts and minds.”* (cf. Philippians 4:7)

I would imagine that there had been little peace within the heart, mind, or life of the woman in our text. A life of prostitution does not lend itself to peace. But the love of Jesus changed that for her, even as it can and does change any such situation for you or me. Jesus has a deep and abiding love for our souls. Jesus has a deep and abiding desire to bless our lives. Consequently, **JESUS’ KINGDOM WORK IS ALWAYS PERSONAL! He wants us to repent of our sins. He wants us to understand the nature of our salvation. He wants us to experience the peace He alone can provide! Amen.**

--Pastor Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be glory!