

Luke 7:36-50
Third Sunday after Pentecost
13 June 2010

“Why Do I Love Him?”

I. Picture yourself arriving at a wedding reception thrown by one of your best church friends for their daughter and new son-in-law. As you mill around looking for the table with your number on it, you have a chance to say “hi” to some of the other guests you know.

And then, over in the far corner you spot him—the ex-husband of the bride’s mother. He’s still suave and good-looking, even with the streaks of gray. That’s probably how he wormed himself into more than one other married woman’s life. In disgust, you turn away from him as you spot your table. But, as you and your spouse begin to sit down, you notice he’s headed your way. No, he’s headed to your table (one detail the bride forgot to inform you about)!

And, to make matters worse, not only is he going to sit at the same table with you, but you realize, as they head toward your table, too, so are the pastor and his wife. Well, at least you won’t have to talk to that . . . jerk! Because the pastor and his wife will surely sit next to you, rather than next to that bum, you might not even have to look his way.

But before you realize it, the pastor has walked past your table and has intercepted the gigolo. “Alright!” your heart applauds; “Maybe he’ll give him the ol’ what-for! That creep hasn’t darkened the doors of the church since she kicked him out fifteen years ago!” But instead, the two men move to the side of the room where you notice the ex-husband has his head down close to the pastor’s. Is that a handkerchief at his eye? Is that the pastor putting his arm around his shoulder? Are they really headed over to the bride’s mother? Is she really going to give that two-timing scum the time of day? Is he really sitting down with her and her second husband, still wiping the tears from his eyes? Can this really be happening?

Might be a real shocker, eh? To see a man like that show up at what would be one of the most important celebrations in the life of his ex-wife and daughter? To see the pastor, of all people, put his arm around him, like he was some long-lost buddy?

II. That's what Simon and his fellow Pharisees were thinking when this woman, this adulteress, had the audacity to crash the dinner party he was throwing in Jesus' honour. She was crying, too; probably tears of embarrassment and shame, the wretch! Just exactly what she should be doing! But not here, not among such respected and holy guests! And, if that wasn't bad enough, here she was slobbering all over the Teacher's feet, wiping them with her harlot-styled long hair . . . kissing them and pouring expensive perfume over them—filling his house with the stench of a party girl!

So, through whose eyes do you see this scene? Jesus? Simon or his guests? The woman who had been living a sinful life? How do you find yourself feeling about her, or the blubbering “gigolo”, for that matter? Sad? Sympathetic? Sick-to-your-stomach disgusted? And what do you think about their crying? Is it a revolting display of emotion? Is it a put-on, a manipulation? Or does it move you to tears, too?

III. As we know from the Gospel, Simon was indignant and disgusted; not just with the woman, but with Jesus. Simon had invited Him because, even if he didn't agree with everything Jesus had been preaching, at least he could be respected as a teacher, maybe even a prophet. But when He lets this woman, this creature, touch Him and carry on over Him like she was, Simon figures Jesus couldn't possibly be a prophet. If He was, surely He would have figured out what kind of thing this lady was and told her to hit the road. Any pious, self-respecting Jew knew scum, like her, were banned from table fellowship with the righteous. She not only was disgraceful and contemptible, but, according to their laws, she was unclean! She defiled any one who touched her or was touched by

her. And, if this was the Friday evening Seder meal, which began the hallowing of the Sabbath day, Jesus would not have been able to take part in the next day's Sabbath services. Those who associated with people like this sinner excluded themselves from the fellowship of God's people!

IV. But if Jesus didn't associate with people like this woman, then He couldn't associate with people like us, could he? Do you remember the name Jeffrey Dahmer, the guy, who murdered and did horrible things to seventeen young men a back around 1990? According to some reliable reports, we're told he became a Christian sometime before he was beaten to death in the washroom by some fellow inmates following a church service.

Does it bother you thinking he might be in heaven, forgiven for all disgusting crimes? But, if Jeffrey Dahmer became a Christian, truly repentant of his sins and sincerely placing his hope in the blood of Jesus shed for him on the cross, then he is in heaven, perhaps rejoicing right at the side of some of those he had killed with his own hands!

If that isn't so, then the woman "who had lived a sinful life" can't really be forgiven or be in heaven, either. Neither could a murderer and adulterer like King David. And neither can I or you. We have all "*sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*," Romans 3:23 says; and in James 2 we hear: "*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it*" (2:8-10). Romans 6 says bluntly: "*The wages of sin is death*"—an eternal punishment where the wailing and gnashing of teeth never ends (Matthew 13:41-43).

If we refuse to forgive the repentant sinner, or boast of our own supposed self-righteousness over them, like the Pharisees did to the woman laying at Jesus' feet, we can't be forgiven ourselves. That's

what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, isn't it? "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*" (Matthew 6:12). In fact, our Lord comments on this petition after teaching His disciples His prayer by saying: "*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (Matthew 6:14-15).

V. However, it's interesting to look at the translation of the Lord's Prayer in the English Standard Version of the Bible that we are using now for our readings and in our hymnal. It translates as the old King James Version did: "*Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors.*" "Debt," or "what is owed," is the more literal translation of the original language.

And that's the language our Lord uses in the parable He uses to tell Simon and His guests when He picks up their thoughts criticizing Him for allowing the woman to kiss His feet and scent them with perfume. In the parable He tells of two completely-broke debtors, one owing five hundred denarii and the other fifty (a denarius being about a day's wage in that time). When the moneylender forgives both of their debts, knowing neither one is able to repay them, He asks Simon, "*Now which of them will love him more?*" The answer's obvious, as Simon replied: "*The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.*"

Simon and his guests couldn't forgive Jesus for His audacity, forgiving this fallen lady as if He were God, because they couldn't see themselves as sinners like her. They didn't lavish our Lord with honour and humble service because they saw themselves as at least as good as Him, and, without a doubt, loads better than her. But, the woman loved Jesus much, because she knew graphically well how large was her debt. The Pharisees might have loved Him at least a little bit if they had seen a need for Him to forgive them at least a little. But they showed no love at all because they saw no need to be forgiven at all.

VI. Simon's problem with Jesus' teaching was that it included sinners—the beauty of the Gospel is that it includes sinners like the woman, and like me and you. That's why she loved him so much. That's why we love Him, too, isn't it? That's why we bow before Him today, and pour out our tears, our gifts and our service, no matter how costly they might be. We love Him because He loved us so much that He went to the cross for us, His lifeless body wrapped with some of the same kind of perfume this woman poured on His feet. We love Him because He loved us and gave Himself for us, as we heard St. Paul write the Galatians: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us . . . so that we might receive the promised Spirit by faith*” (Galatians 3:13-14).

When we come on our knees, with our tears, with our shame, our Lord doesn't push us away in disgust. He welcomes us to table fellowship with Him. He welcomes our love and our service to Him. And then He tell us “*Go in peace,*” forgiven and loved, to share His love and forgiveness with fellow sinners who are crying and dying to hear that Good News.

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Legend has it that a wealthy merchant traveling through the Mediterranean world looking for the distinguished Pharisee, Paul, encountered his fellow-worker, Timothy, who arranged a visit. At the time Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Stepping inside the cell, the merchant was surprised to find a rather old man, physically frail, but whose serenity challenged the visitor. They talked for hours. Finally the merchant left with Paul's blessing.

Outside the prison, the man asked, “What's the secret of this man's power? I have never seen anything like it before.”

“Can't you guess?” replied Timothy. Paul is in love.”

The merchant looked bewildered, “In love, you say?”

“Yes,” the missionary answered, “Paul is in love with Jesus Christ.”

The merchant looked even more confused. “Is that all?”

Smiling, Timothy replied, “Sir, that love is everything.”

And it is everything, isn’t it?

Go in peace, brothers and sisters, and serve the Lord in gladness.

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