

Sermon Reading: Luke 7:36-50

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.³⁸ 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 people 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 forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"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—as her great love has shown. But whoever 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."

Sermon Theme: Your Debt is Canceled

Anyone who has had any debt has probably wondered what it would be like to have that erased. Whether it's credit cards or student loans, mortgages or hospital bills, or owing someone a favor, imagine what it would be like to have all that debt, what you owe canceled. You receive a letter in the mail or email like you do every month for that bill and it shows "Balance Due: \$0.00." You go to check on returning the favor and the person asks you, "What favor?" How many times I would have to check again just to be sure. You would have so many questions probably starting with, "Why?" and "How?" Quickly followed with how you would want to

show your thankfulness. You have had a serious debt canceled; that is, the debt of sin. But by our actions it can seem like we forget or at least fail to appreciate what that means for us.

Jesus is invited to the house of a certain Pharisee named Simon (different from the disciple Simon Peter). We aren't told what the big occasion is or if this Pharisee had some hidden agenda, but Jesus goes to his house and reclines at the table to have dinner with him. And that's where we meet this unnamed woman. She is unnamed, but her reputation proceeds her. We aren't told exactly what she did but she was well-known in town. Something she had done or even failed to do had won her the title: sinner. She is outside of the group; a social outcast who probably wasn't welcomed by many people and more likely shunned. She probably had seen many side-glances or overheard whispers as she walked along the street.

But in some way this woman had come to know Jesus. Maybe she had heard about Jesus, heard Jesus himself speak, or saw him perform miracles. Whatever it was had made a lasting impression on her and her life and so when she hears Jesus is in town she searches him out. Finally, she finds him and is behind Jesus. But she is so overcome with emotion she begins weeping. She can't control herself. I can't imagine she planned for this when she met Jesus. But here she is weeping and now Jesus' feet are wet with her tears. What is she supposed to do? She unties her hair, dries off Jesus' feet, proceeds to kiss them, and pours perfume on them to show her love for Jesus.

It's no surprise that Simon the Pharisee saw all this going on. It would have been hard to not notice a weeping woman who unties her hair and starts drying someone's feet. It would have been very difficult to ignore the smell of the perfume that filled the air. But what catches his attention the most: **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,**" he thinks to himself.

What was his problem? Simply: it was who the woman was. The Pharisee knew this woman's background and so he was unable and unwilling to take anything she did in the kindest possible way. Without saying a word to her he had already decided where she was in his books: a sinner whose very touch would contaminate you. Sadly we do that too, don't we? Because we hear about someone's background, what they have done, we treat them differently. I'm talking about the alcoholic who continues to struggle. The wife who cheated on her husband. The man who ended up in prison. Those sins and actions that we see as worse than others. Instead of showing love, we keep them at arm's length because we are afraid of how their reputation might contaminate our own.

Jesus knew Simon the Pharisee's problem and what he was thinking. **"Simon, I have something to tell you,"** Jesus says. He then goes on to tell a story; a parable to teach him and us: **Two people 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**

forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? Because their debts were canceled who will show more love and appreciation?

Simon supposes, “The one who had the bigger debt canceled.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus says. But what Simon didn’t judge correctly was how he trapped himself. This Pharisee had thought that he was so much better than this well-known sinner. But he failed to see his own sin. So Jesus points it out. This man had failed to show even the slightest sign of courtesy to welcome his guest. But everywhere he had failed, the woman had gone over and above to show love. The Pharisee had his own personal standards that he was comparing this woman to and his own expectations of how one should be living and acting. This woman had failed! But no one would argue against that. She was a sinner; she was well aware of that too. But the Pharisee failed to recognize his own debt and his own sins when comparing himself to her; therefore, she was beneath him.

We are careful to not say that someone is beneath us. In fact, we are almost offended if someone accuses us of even thinking such; “I’m not better than anyone,” we are quick to say. But then you add, “I know I’m not perfect but at least I haven’t done _____.” We downplay our own failures while at the same time raise up others’ sins to be worse than us so that they might overshadow our own.

Or, “I know that I should be doing better at this, but at least I do...I know I shouldn’t be doing that, but at least I don’t...” All this is doing is setting up your personal standards that you know you can live by, while at the same time—whether you recognize it or not—you are also saying that anyone who doesn’t live up to that standard is worse than you. Like that Pharisee, it’s self-righteousness, it’s our pride trying to make ourselves look better in the eyes of ourselves, other people, and, maybe even trying to gain some favor with God. But what it’s really doing is ignoring or failing to recognize your own debt of sin.

But when looking at sin and that debt you owe, God doesn’t compare you to others. He only compares you to Him and his standard of perfection. In 1 Corinthians 6 the greedy is just as unfit for God’s kingdom as the sexually immoral. The slanderer—one who talks poorly about their neighbor, spreading rumors and gossip—is just as much outside God’s kingdom as the cheater. We tend to see different sins on different levels where one is worse than another. But what God sees is either you are a sinner or you are not.

One might then say, “At least I do enough good things that should outweigh the sins.” But do you really? Take for example the amount of times where we do a “good” thing, but then follow it up with a sin. Every time I’m patient with the stranger in the store, the next time I have no patience for anything even to the point of being fed up with the worker who is giving more attention to someone else instead of me. For every time that I selflessly serve and volunteer, the next time I do it grumbling and complaining about how other people don’t step up and do something. How could we ever hope to get out of a debt that keeps growing and compounding?

And then if we are honest, we even fail at our own personal standards we set up. What are we supposed to do? Because the truth is that even if you did do more good things that could outweigh your sins, the fact is those sins still remain. And because you sin God's Law gives you the title you earned for yourself: sinner. Outside of God's family, not welcomed into God's heavenly home.

While the Pharisee uncomfortably shifts being shown his own sin, Jesus explains the actions of the woman, **I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown.** From her Savior's lips she hears what she already believes to be true. What else could have brought her to weeping? Why else would she be covering Jesus' feet with kisses and perfume? And then Jesus assures the woman, **Your sins are forgiven.** Your debt is canceled, Jesus says. What music to this woman's ears. For someone who was so often looked down upon, she hears all is well between her and God. For someone whose reputation was all but destroyed, Jesus assures her that God sees her as his perfect and holy child. Because she trusted that God's promises were true, that he had power to forgive all sin, she shows great love to the one who forgives.

Your sins are forgiven, that's what Jesus says to you and me. Jesus knows the exact amount that your sins owed; he bore them with himself on the cross. Jesus knows how much the payment had to be for self-righteous, pride filled sinners; he paid it with the shedding of his blood. Jesus fulfills the standard of perfection demanded by His Father so that with his crying out on the cross, "It is finished," your entire debt is removed. We know the Father accepted the payment because on Easter Morning Jesus is raised to live again. Your debt is canceled; your bill reads at zero. In fact, through faith, God now credits your account with Jesus' good work and perfect living. And that's all God sees.

Your sins are forgiven; that was promised to you already when you were baptized. Your debt of sin will not be counted against you because you were washed and sanctified—set apart as God's child. God sees you wearing Jesus' perfection and righteousness with a room waiting that Jesus has prepared for you in heaven. Your sins are forgiven, that's what Jesus continues to reaffirm in you when you are in his Word and grow in it. Your sins are forgiven, that's what you hear and receive personally when you come forward to the Lord's Supper and Jesus gives you the very thing that paid your debt, his body and blood, to strengthen your faith.

The more we grow in appreciation and knowledge of what it means for me personally to have my debt canceled, the more willing we are to be gracious to others. "Your sins are forgiven," so go, live in that forgiveness freed from the burden of your sin. Show it not just today for an hour, but this afternoon, Monday morning as you go to work, Tuesday evening when you are at home, all day every day. Show the love of Jesus that he has shown to you. Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace. Amen.