

**FEET FIRST****Luke 7:36-50**

**Intro:** I've used it before and it never gets any less distressing, but it's very apropos to this talk today: Philip Yancey, in his book, *THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW*, and later in his book, *WHAT'S SO AMAZING ABOUT GRACE*, tells a story of a prostitute as related to him by, in Yancey's words, ". . . a friend who works with the down and out in Chicago". Here's the account:

*"She came to me in wretched straits, homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her daughter. Through sobs and tears, she told me she had been renting out her daughter to men interested in kinky sex. She made more renting out her daughter for an hour than she could earn on her own in a night.*

*"She had to do it, she said, to support her own drug habit. I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story. I had no idea what to say to this woman.*

*"At last I asked if she had ever thought of going to a church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naive shock that crossed her face. Church?!" she cried. Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."*

Ask yourself the question, Would ABC make her feel worse?

Tim Chester begins his discussion of our text with a similar account in his book, *A MEAL WITH JESUS*. Listen:

*"Imagine you're at a dinner party. The host is a respectable church leader and local councilman who lives in a big house on the posh side of town.*

*Tonight the dinner party is in honor of a visiting speaker. You're glad to have been invited, because there's been a lot of talk about this man. He's been causing something of a stir with his radical views. Some people won't have anything to do with him. But you've got an open mind. It's good to have an opportunity to find out what he's really like.*

*You hear the doorbell but think nothing of it, until a woman pushes her way into the room. You see the despairing face of the host's wife. This new arrival is wearing a tight fitting, low-cut blouse; a skirt that's way too short, and stiletto heels. She's painted up to the nines and totters slightly as she walks - she's probably had one drink too many. She looks like the sort of woman who stands on street corners.*

*She goes straight to the visiting speaker and throws her arms around him, clasping his head to her bosom. "I'll always be yours." you hear her mumble. And she begins to massage his shoulders. It's then that you notice she's crying, her mascara streaking down her cheeks.*

*Everyone seems to freeze. What a thing for a respectable person to have to endure. You feel for him. How embarrassing!*

*But instead of pushing her away, he reaches up and puts his arms around her. He says something to her that sounds like, "And you're mine." But he can't have said that! It's obvious what kind of woman she is. He can surely see that for himself! He ought to show some discernment. She might think it's a come on. Maybe it is. Maybe he's one of her customers. This visiting speaker clearly has big problems."*

And then Chester begins unpacking our text for today. Let me read it to you as you visualize what you've just heard. Listen,

**(Read Luke 7:36-50)**

Puts it in a different light doesn't it?

Jesus is treating this woman in a very intimate way in response the intimate way she has treated him. It's . . . INAPPROPRIATE! It was inappropriate in that society and certainly in the home of a Pharisee – and it still is. But as we saw last week . . .

**Jesus is the friend of sinners**

- He's the friend of riff raff, traitors, the unrespectable, drunks, druggies, prostitutes, the mentally ill, the broken, and the needy – actually anyone and everyone whose lives are a mess. Last week we talked about the lessons we had from Matthew's dinner table and here it continues.
- This account has a parallel reading in Matthew chapter 11 and it is the place where Jesus finishes out his teaching with this beautiful invitation, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Matthew 11:28-30. G. Campbell Morgan points

out that it could be that this woman, who was considered such a sinner, heard those words and she was so moved by the grace, that she had nothing but reckless and unashamed thanksgiving for Jesus and it resulted in her incredible act of love and devotion.

- All the while, Simon the Pharisee, is thinking, *“If this guy's as good as they say he is, he should have known better. He should have seen her for who and what she is. And if he's a prophet, he should have known it in his spirit.”*
- This is way self-righteous people often think – I know, because I've thought like Simon far too often in my life. And what Simon and I are missing is the huge fact that . . .

### **Jesus DOES know who we are**

- Yes! He knows who we are whether we are like a Pharisee or a prostitute and everywhere in between. AND. . . he still loves us! He loved us enough to die for us. So, in the same way that Jesus saw the heart of the sinful woman, he sees the heart of Simon as well, and he's not happy with what he sees there.
- A little background to put this in perspective. G. Campbell Morgan points out how the meaning of Pharisee is a revealing one. The word “Pharisee” is not a Greek word. Instead it is an adaptation of the Jewish name for these men and is from the Hebrew word which means “separation”. The Pharisees were all about keeping separate from anything that was evil. They were good people who really tried to live the straight and narrow. The problem is when you get that determined your vision tends to get clouded. Simon was a good man with fuzzy vision and, as far as he was concerned, for Jesus to allow this woman to treat him as she did, was inherently evil. A good and holy man as Simon was, and also as Jesus was supposed to be, just wasn't supposed to participate in such behavior.
- But Jesus did know this woman and he loved her. And he did know Simon and he loved him. These two people from different parts of town, Simon from the Upper East Side, and this woman from the red light district, were both in the same house, and the reason they were there, was Jesus. And they were both proof that . . .

### **Everyone has a huge debt**

- Simon thought this party crasher had issues but he was forgetting his own. He also thought Jesus had issues. Jesus had to school him in hospitality which he made into a teachable moment on grace and forgiveness.
- Simon blew it as a host. If he was a good one he would have acted like one. He missed the basic protocol for welcoming a guest into his home. He had neglected greet Jesus with a kiss and he had ignored the simple act of having Jesus's feet washed and anointed his head with oil. This was the minimum requirement, and the implication I get from this text, is that other guests had received what Jesus had not. Jesus was snubbed. Simon invited Jesus and then blew him off. He was a host who was not a host. Jesus uses this debt of simple honor to teach Simon of his own debt that was as significant as that of the sinful woman.
- The problem is, the woman knew her debt and Simon did not. FB Meyer writes, *“The woman represents those who penitently and lovingly recognize the Divine love. She was not forgiven because of her love; but her love was a sign that she had been forgiven and recognized it.”* Simon, the Pharisee, on the other hand, stands for the unloving and self-righteous who are ignorant of the love of God. *“They may be respectable in life, rigid in morality, unquestioned in their orthodoxy, but what are all these things without love?”* This is the very point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 13 where he shows that even when you do everything right, if you don't have love, it's just a lot of empty noise.
- So . . .

### **Who needs forgiveness?**

- Everyone! With a simple story, designed to show that love grows out of forgiveness, Jesus backs Simon into a corner, where he, to his credit, has to confess the truth that the greater the forgiveness, the greater the love.
- I'd like to think that Simon learned from this message since he didn't try to evade Jesus's question. I think he realized, with the sinful woman who was an uninvited guest in his home, that if one knows the depth of his/her own sin and the greatness of God's forgiveness, they cannot but love with as great a love as this woman did.

- Who needs forgiveness? WE DO!!!

**Conclusion:** So what's the point? Well, we can learn from the sinful woman who isn't named and the Pharisee who is. They realized the value of feet first grace and mercy. The woman who was lost washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and Simon who had it all together had completely overlooked basic hospitality when he didn't wash Jesus's feet, and in so doing they both revealed their grasp of their need. The woman knew grace when she saw it and Simon took some time to recognize it.

Both were broken and it's certain the woman gained healing when Jesus said "*Your faith has healed you; go in peace.*" Luke 7:50. I'd like to think Simon gained healing too and that he received that same peace.

What it takes for us is realizing we are all broken people in a broken world and as we experience healing, we must not keep it to ourselves and hoard it like the worst of the worst Pharisees. Instead, we, the Church, need to be a community of broken people bringing the healing that only Jesus can provide, and as we do we can bring broken people to the table with us. Amen.