

Title: She Loved Much
Text: Luke 7.36-50
Theme: Saved by Faith
Series: *Luke*
Prop Stmt: God delights to save every person who comes to him in faith.

Luke 7 has been full of surprises. 2,000 years later, we are still amazed at what Jesus did. The only thing more amazing is what Christ said. And we know these accounts. Many of you, if not most of you have read these accounts over and over and they are still fascinating. The disciples who witnessed all of this in real time had to be overwhelmed. My oldest grandson wanted to go to Cedar Point for his 10th birthday, so I took him. We hit every roller coaster we could. After a day like that, or being out on a boat, you lay down and close your eyes and your body still feels like it is on a ride. I bet the disciples felt a bit like that every night. What just happened?! Their heads had to be spinning as they were trying to absorb everything that had gone on that day. So many crazy things took place, that they may have been tempted to think that nothing shocks them anymore. What else could happen? Well....

Read Text:

Obviously, this text makes it very clear that being religious does not mean that you are a genuine follower of Christ. This Pharisee was seriously devout and exceedingly religious and he was dead wrong because he did not believe the right things about Christ. But this text also makes it clear that genuine faith involves a genuine love of Christ. Every story of Jesus eating brings some kind of a surprise and Jesus eats a lot. Here we read that *"one of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him."* Jesus is starting to come under some pretty intense scrutiny and that is the case here, because the Pharisee did not even provide Jesus with the most basic expressions of hospitality. He invites Jesus to his home but does nothing to make him feel at home. So, things are tense. The fact that Jesus is invited and the fact that he goes is a surprise. But there are more surprises coming. Look at v.37. The outcast and "broken" are not the only ones who need the gospel. Self-righteous, moral, successful, respectable and religious people need it just as much. The problem is, they usually don't know it.

"And behold!" BAM!! No kidding, behold! If you thought it was pretty shocking that Jesus would be in a Pharisee's house for dinner, you were really about to be shocked. A *"woman of the city, who was a sinner"* shows up. Luke's delicate description of this woman's reputation is based on what had been her "career." What is a woman like this, doing at a dinner like this? We are about to find out. Just her showing up had to cause people to hold their breath, but no one (except Jesus) was prepared for what she did. Do you see this?

1. Jesus is worth radical and sacrificial love. (36-38)

Look at the verbs in vs. 37-38. She is on a mission. She learned, she brought, standing behind him, weeping, she wet his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed his feet, anointed them with the ointment. When we read this, we get tense, don't we? This is really

uncomfortable. V.49 informs us that there were others who were there. She did this in front of them. Do you realize that everybody is uncomfortable with this, except Jesus? This is intensely personal. Her presence, her overwhelming emotions, her touching, letting her hair down, kissing his feet, all are displays that she is absolutely overwhelmed to be near Christ.

This woman is unnamed. My guess is that she became part of the early church, and Luke did not need to mention her name out of respect for her and protection of her. There was no need for everyone to know her past. But when she heard that Jesus was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, she made a decision to identify herself with Christ. At this point in the ministry of Christ, the Pharisees had not yet formally rejected Christ, identified him as their enemy and organized to destroy him. They were increasingly threatened by him because he exposed their sinful and self-righteous hearts, and the lines of battle were being formed. This invitation for dinner was publicly known. I think that we should conclude that the invitation to the meal was motivated by a desire to trap Jesus and expose him in front of others. The Pharisee invited to this meal, but did not treat him like (as the police would say) a person of interest, rather than a guest. The meal would be eaten in a courtyard in the home where people of the town could gather and stand around and listen to the conversation that promised to be interesting. No one had any how idea how interesting it would be. This woman did not crash the party in that sense. But she definitely created a scene. She found an opportunity to show her love and appreciation of Christ in an intensely personal way that was not sensuous. She knew how to do that. This was clearly not that.

This woman knew what it was like to be used. Maybe she had a family member who abused her as a child and she thought that was all she was good for. Maybe her mom taught her to dress a certain way to attract attention, to use her appearance to influence, then trap, then control. It was a cheap sense of power. Maybe she found the emptiness of selling her body to be haunting, the guilt overwhelming, and the shame crushing but she had no way of escape or she believed the lie that this is all that she was good for.

What she discovered in Christ was someone who had no interest in using her, but who genuinely loved her. Love gives. When Christ looked at her, he did not look to take, look to lust, look to proposition, he looked because he knew her, and he loved her. When she heard the words of Christ, she knew that he was not trying to exploit her but was seeking to rescue her. She knew she was loved by Christ. And she believed it. The love of Christ changed her. This woman who was not welcome in most homes in that town was welcome to be with Christ and she knew it. She was so confident in the love, acceptance and affirmation of Christ that she responded to this opportunity in a radical, extravagant and sacrificial way. She went to this Pharisee's house and brought an alabaster flask with ointment. She planned this. She stood behind Christ while he was reclining in the presence of others and wept so much that her tears washed his feet. The verb for weeping (v.38) was used to describe rain. Her response to Christ was from her entire being. Mind you, his feet were dirty. The host had not bothered to provide water and towel for the feet of Christ, which, honestly was highly offensive. In towns where human refuse was thrown into the very streets that people walked in, it was very important, not just courteous to wash your feet. She washed the feet of Christ with her tears then wiped them

with her hair. Then she kissed them. Then she anointed them with this ointment. This is personal. Yes, because the love of Christ for you is personal. Therefore, your response to the love of Christ is personal. Jesus is worth your radical and sacrificial love. How would you describe your response to the love of Christ? Radical or reserved? Sacrificial or Sophisticated? Tempered or Extravagant? Some of you have no caution when you talk about your dog, truck, sports team or grandkids. Why is it acceptable and celebrated to be extravagant for that, but we have a measure of concern for those who respond like that toward Christ? Here is what we have to take to heart. This woman not only understood something that the Pharisee did not, she also understood something that some of us may not. And that should get your attention. Jesus is worth radical and sacrificial love.

Consider this. She did not do this in order to earn the love of Christ or to pay for his approval or to pay for her sins (we will see that in a minute). She did this in response to his love. This was a response of her heart to God's heart. Many of you struggle with this. When we hesitate to embrace the love of God for us, we are doubting God. God sent Christ. *"But God show his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* The perfect life of Christ completely filled the demands of God's justice for a perfect sacrifice. He filled up the tank of perfection. You cannot add one drop of your goodness to his righteousness. Your good is not good enough anyway and besides, there is nothing left for you to add to his perfect life. Christ is enough. The love of Christ is enough. That is why his death on the cross, paid in full for every single sin of every single person who would trust in him by faith alone. There is nothing left for you to pay. You are loved. Believe that. That is not only necessary for you to believe that in order to truly be a Christian, but it is how God designed you to live.

Many of you live with deep insecurities. It comes out in one of two ways. For some, your head is down, your expectations low, your frustrations apparent, because you don't measure up or you live with anxiety and an unreasonable drive for perfection because you are trying to control everything and everyone around you and others threaten you. You are either depressed because you will never be good enough, or you are always on edge because you are trying to prove yourself. Oh beloved, let this woman disciple you. Let her teach you. She did not wait to love Jesus until she was good enough. She would never be good enough. That's not the point. She loved Christ back because he loved her first and she was not in a hurry, as we will see.

2. Jesus is not on trial, we are. (39-40)

The Pharisee's name is Simon. Simon was one of the most common names in Israel in that time. This is not how he had planned dinner. But it was giving him some of the data that he was looking for. His observation was that Jesus was clueless. Seriously, it did not take a sociologist to discern what occupation this woman had been involved in. In fact, this alabaster of ointment may have been part of her tainted earnings. What kind of a holy man, a man of God would allow this sort of woman, this sinner, to touch him? Simon felt like he had the evidence that he needed. Jesus was obviously not a prophet. What Simon did not realize is that Jesus is not on trial, we are. We don't judge him. His heart, character, purposes words and deeds are not for us to scrutinize. Oh no! All of those things scrutinize us. They expose us and what they reveal is

how much we need a Savior. Simon thought he was having a private conversation with himself. He thought that his thoughts were known only to him. If this man were a prophet, he wouldn't allow this woman to touch him. So, what does Christ do? "*Simon, I have something to say to you.*" Look at the beginning of v.40. "*And Jesus answering him...*" Jesus was answering Simon's thoughts. Simon thought that the conversation was in his head, but Jesus was not only going to address Simon's sinful and prideful heart, he was informing Simon that he was a prophet from God. In fact, he was the perfect prophet, the Son of God who knew the thoughts of Simon's heart, which was about to become apparent to Simon and to everyone at the meal. Jesus, once again, masterfully tells a story.

3. Deep love comes from deep forgiveness. (41-49)

Not only does Jesus tell a story but he does so in a way that sounds a lot like Nathan the prophet doesn't he? In order for David to see his own sin, he had to see it in someone else. So, here, Jesus, who the Pharisee thinks is not a prophet, is doing exactly what prophets do. He is speaking the word of God in a way that he rivets the truth into the heart of the listener. Jesus engages his listener in such a way that Simon gives the right answer which sets him up for the application. The story is the bait that disguises the hook

A certain moneylender.... Moneylenders can be blessings if they help a person out of a tough spot and are able to help them bridge a gap until they can get on their feet or they can be vicious (loan sharks) and can take advantage of how vulnerable a person is by charging high interest and demanding collateral that would ruin the person in need. In this case, there are two debtors. The one owes 500 denarii, which would be equivalent to somewhere in the neighborhood of \$97,500 and other owes the moneylender a 1/10 of that (50 denarii or \$9,750. When neither could pay, the moneylender cancelled the debt of both. Wow! Then Jesus sets the hook. "*Now which of them will love him more?*" Simon responds: "*The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.*"

Then Jesus asks, "*Do you see this woman?*" Here it comes. If the air had not yet gone out of the room, it was about to now. Jesus now resets the picture by revealing what is really going on by exposing the heart of the Pharisee in his own house. Once again, he flips the script. This is what Jesus does. He exposes our need so that we will trust him, follow him and love him. Exposing our need is not to shame us, but to save us. But it is impossible to save those who do not know they are drowning. I was a lifeguard at a pool for a couple of summers back in high school. We were taught that the most difficult person to rescue was the one who viewed you as a threat and fought you instead of letting you help them. Jesus is clearly a threat to every one of us who is self-righteous and who thinks that we don't need to be rescued. Simon's self-righteousness (his attempt to earn God's favor through religious merit) was damning him and he had to see that. So, Jesus lays it out. Your "righteousness" (category) motivates you to scorn Jesus. Her need (unrighteousness) causes her to trust Jesus and love him.

You gave me no water for my feet but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

This account is a series of tense surprises. Beginning with a Pharisee inviting Jesus to his house for a meal. Here comes another. Jesus now tells Simon that the woman's sins are forgiven. Jesus knows that she has sinned. He knows that she has sinned a lot "her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much." Now Simon has a bigger problem on his hand. He thought that he was investigating Jesus as to whether or not he was a prophet only to have Jesus claim to be God. "Who is this, who even forgives sin?" Simon, is your self-righteousness so blinding that you cannot even see God when he is reclining at your table?

4. Deep forgiveness comes from genuine faith. (50)

Then, in his first recorded words to this woman, he tells her the greatest thing she or anyone could ever hear. "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Please do not miss this. This woman was not saved because of her sacrificial love. She was saved because of her faith and the authenticity of her faith was displayed by her extravagant love.

A number of years later, a former Pharisee by the name of Paul would write a letter a group of believers in Rome about the gospel. He would start with this ground-leveling, and self-righteousness destroying truth that if you are immoral, you are a sinner who is under the righteous wrath of God and you need a Savior because you cannot save yourself. If you are moral, you are a sinner who is under the righteous wrath of God and you need a Savior because you cannot save yourself. If you are religious, you are a sinner who is under the righteous wrath of God and you need a Savior because you cannot save yourself. However, if you trust in Christ alone who died on the cross to pay for your sin, then your sins whether sins of idolatry, immorality, or pridefulness are forgiven and you are declared righteous. Who is this, who even forgives sin? The One who died to secure that. Do you believe him and love him for it?

The account ends. Don't you want to know what happened? What did that do to the conversation? Did Jesus still get dessert? We don't know. But I have a theory. I think we may end up meeting Simon in heaven. First of all, Luke names him. Secondly, how did Luke know what Simon was thinking (v.39)? Either the Spirit of God revealed that to him, or Simon told him about it. I think it is possible that Simon was indeed gripped by the words of Christ and in the end opened up his heart to him, not just his home. I pray you do the same.