

Luke 7:36-50: “Go In Peace.”

Preface:

Well, friends, it feels like it's been ages since I was able to speak with you all. Only two weeks, really, but a lot of life can happen in that time, you know? I hope for all of us the stuff of life that's gone on has been good, has felt good.

Introduction:

Today's passage is compelling. It's compelling. It's earthy, it's powerful, it triggers our senses and emotions. I hope that we can enter into it, imagine ourselves there, and really see Jesus engaging with these people around him.

We've heard it before, I'm almost sure. I hope when we're done this morning we're left haunted by the example of the sinner in this story, and challenged by her choices.

Let me pray for us.

Prayer:

The Set Up:

Luke tells us about a time when Jesus went to dinner at Simon's house. This isn't Simon Peter, who we all call Peter anyway.

Simon's a Pharisee, someone who worked hard to make sure people didn't break the rules for living God

gave his special, covenant people...by making harder, better, protective rules. The rules God would have made if he'd thought a little more about it. I'm kidding. The Pharisees were trying to be faithful; they just missed God's point entirely, right?

And there's a reason this passage is almost always titled "Jesus and the sinful woman" or something like that, not "Jesus and Simon the Pharisee." There's a reason we don't remember Simon existed, but we remember this woman.

She learns that Jesus is at Simon's house, and goes there. They're probably eating on a patio, in a public space, and this woman, rather than gawking from the bushes, climbs up to Jesus who is lying on a sort of bench or chaise lounge at the table, his head near his plate, his feet off to the side--think of a kiddo watching TV, propped on an elbows with a snack.

The woman just stands behind him, crying, weeping. Jesus and Simon--whoever else is there--watch her as she kneels down and wipes her face, and takes her own tears, and wets Jesus' feet, and then takes her hair and wipes off the pasty, dirty mud that happens when his dusty feet and her tears start mixing together.

She's got mud on her cheeks and in her hair, made from her tears and the dirt on Jesus' feet. From a delicate little perfume jar, carved out of a white mineral called alabaster--something like white marble,

only more rare, more expensive--she pours perfume onto his now cleaned feet. It's like burning a big wad of cash to warm your hands for a minute. It's wasteful; a bad allocation of resources.

Simon's appalled by the whole thing and thinks to himself that if Jesus knew how sinful this lady was--she's unclean, untouchable--he wouldn't let her near him.

Simon & The Sinner:

And Jesus tells a parable that forces Simon to acknowledge that people who have a lot of debt written off are more grateful than those who only have a little bit of debt written off.

"Whoever has been forgiven little, loves little." He says, right after pointing out to Simon that she may be a sinner, but he's a terrible host--because he didn't provide any way for Jesus to clean his feet after his dusty-road, sandals-only walk to Simon's house. He didn't anoint Jesus with oil for refreshment. He didn't greet Jesus with a kiss, like a good host should--and why would Simon do this stuff, right? Because it's clear that Jesus is a dubious character to him, and Simon doesn't touch dubious characters--he has a reputation, and his version of faithfulness to protect. Simon's above Jesus, and he knows it. Simon apparently invited Jesus over for the spectacle of it, or to try and convert him or something.

But this sinner, she has nothing to protect. She's been

bought out, and had her debt written off; she's been forgiven.

She has no theological precision or religious purity to protect anymore. She's covered in dried, foot-mud, trespassing on a rich religious guy's patio. The only thing she has to protect is her gratitude, and you protect gratitude in one way: by making sure you show it. You protect gratitude by showing it. Love is protected when it's acted on.

Jesus says:

“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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

He tells the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.”

And the other guests murmur, of course, because Jesus shouldn't say these things. But he can say these things. He can declare someone's sins forgiven, and, as he declares it, make it so. His words are like magic, are powerful in a way that ours aren't. Although I pray

that we've all experienced the power that comes when someone has confessed to us their own guilt, and we've told them "God forgives you." It's a step removed, but only just, and a gift to be an agent of God's mercy in anyone's life.

But Jesus doesn't let the woman who he's forgiven let their murmurs be the last word she hears--instead he sends her off in peace, and reminds her that her faith--that word we could translate trust, belief, faithfulness--it has saved her.

Jesus doesn't say that to anyone else at the table, washed feet or unwashed feet.

Perspectives:

And I went back and forth on if we should consider this scene from Simon's perspective or the sinner's, because we can find ourselves in either place, depending on what we care more about this morning.

We may, like Simon, care about what we have to protect. It may be our status, it may be our reputation, sometimes we even feel as if we have to protect God's reputation--because, of course, it's often the case that those who, like Simon, care deeply about religious purity often care more that God's name isn't sullied than their's is.

But Jesus reveals to us that God doesn't need protected from sinners. God doesn't need protected from sinners.

This woman who has gone down in history as “the sinful woman,” should have been called the “the loving woman.” Which tells me that we read the passage more from Simon’s point of view than her’s, I guess.

Jesus reveals that he simply doesn’t judge people the way we do. Her identity to him isn’t in what she has done in her past, it’s what she’s doing in her present-- and what she’s doing in her present is revealing her gratitude to him through her loving thoughtfulness.

Simon shames Jesus by refusing him common courtesy; this woman ignores common courtesy, and welcomes shame, so that Jesus can know she loves him. Do we see that? Simon shames Jesus by refusing him common courtesy; this woman ignores common courtesy and welcomes shame, so that Jesus can know she loves him.

He sends her off in peace for it, saying out loud for herself and everyone that the forgiveness she already feels really is true. His last words are “Go in peace.”

Peace:

“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

I tend to not talk enough about the inner peace that the Spirit of God can bring us. I don’t mention enough the peacefulness we can feel in the middle of anxiety,

or the restfulness our hearts can have when we realize that God sought us out, and has brought us back to himself, searched and found us. I want us to remember that we are safe, we are strong, that the slow efforts of God over generations lead to each of us having unshakeable hearts which no waves of worry or guilt can overcome, no darkness blot out.

But I forget to frame this in terms of peace, mostly, mostly because so many of us, when we came to Christ, this is the primary benefit that we were presented. We weren't told how we were made to bring peace in places of conflict, reject war and violence, reject racial, political, ethnic, national divisions. And so I feel often that we all have a long way to go in owning that the good news of Jesus demands relational peace-making as much as it blesses us with peacefulness.

But sometimes we are just sinners, broken, like this woman with her lists of unnamed, isolating secrets and we live with our shames stuffed into places of our hearts that we never, ever look into. And somehow, this woman--and it's almost a blessing she doesn't have a name, because then her name can be any one of ours--this woman somehow realized that God loved her. Something Jesus did or said caused her to realize that God loved her, and she believed it. And she was saved.

The peace Jesus sends her on with is a promise, a promise that...oh, that she will not be alone. That

God's love will not leave her. That all the isolating, shaming hatred of the Simons around her just doesn't matter. It's a gift. A blessing in the most true sense: a word spoken that changes or makes reality.

Conclusion: Peace

So, first of all...when was the last time you experienced this peace? The sense that you were loved, you were safe, you were--you were God's own child? We all accumulate, as time goes by, things we lock into places of our hearts that we dare not look at. We all accumulate secret sins. We all accumulate the need to remember Jesus' affection, our forgiveness. We all need forgiveness to be more than a theory, or relevant for someone else, some new person coming to faith, or that jerk we know.

Conclusion: Security

Secondly, when have we acted like Simon lately? Thinking we need to protect God's reputation, protect our own reputation, and all the while, neglecting the most basic courtesies and kindness that God's people are meant to give? I wish for all of us that we had nothing to prove. I want to have nothing to prove, to be me before God, a friend to sinners and saints. Authentic, and open to change, and ever-more like Jesus as I learn from and reject my failures. What do we think we need to protect God from? And who gave us the false responsibilities we live with?

Conclusion: Gratitude

Lastly, are we protecting gratitude? A grateful heart is

wastefully extravagant. Are we grateful to God for all that God has done for us, freed us from having to pay back or make up for? If we're not grateful to God, okay. You know, I get it. Maybe we're just sleepy. And rather than ask, "Should we be?" and shame us, then I'll ask this: Who are we grateful to, grateful for? Who around us needs to know we are grateful for their presence in our lives? And what would it look like to be wastefully extravagant to that person?

"Go in peace," is a blessing, a power, a spoken word that turns into something real. I want us to go in peace. To become peace--our hearts at peace, our presence a peacemaking presence everywhere we live, play, work. I think I want today, more than anything, for us to be at peace: grateful, happy, relaxed peace, because we know that we're forgiven, we're loved, we're safe, and our gratitude has gotten Christ's good attention.