

*In Appreciation* – Luke 7:36-50

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The setting of this story is another meal that Jesus finds himself part of. It's a formal banquet, where the guests of honor would recline gracefully -- an environment designed specifically for important figures to offer lectures and insights on moral and theological issues.

The strain in the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees did not prevent a Pharisee named Simon from inviting Jesus to be his special guest at this public meal. But this proper, refined atmosphere is interrupted by the surprising entrance of an inappropriate, uninvited guest -- a woman, we are told, who was a sinner.

Her behavior in that room that day is as unexpected and outlandish as her presence. Although she herself doesn't speak throughout this entire narrative, her actions and gestures communicate quite a bit.

The woman is not financially destitute: she brings with her a costly "alabaster jar of ointment." But, her behavior suggests she has faced some emotional destitution, for at the sight of Jesus she begins to weep -- bathing his feet, in fact, with her tears. She follows this emotional display by then drying Jesus' feet with her hair, while continuing to apply tears and now the ointment in liberal quantities.

Culturally, by simply touching Jesus, this woman has ritually defiled him. She is present where she shouldn't be. She has uncovered her hair in public. She has acted on her own outside any family connections -- all shameful, impure,

scandalous behaviors for a first-century Jewish woman.

When Simon protests both her presence and her actions, Jesus reminds Simon that she was the one who, through her loving actions toward him, has accepted and given thanks for the forgiveness offered to her by Jesus.

When she first walked into that house that day, she had to have known that forgiveness awaited her. And she's so thankful for it that she does all she can to show Jesus her love.

She knows that even for her—somebody known to be as far away from faithful living as she could be—there was a loving, forgiving, another-chance-giving Lord waiting to embrace her as forgiven.

She knew God's forgiveness still was meant for her. And she accepts it and shows through her tears how thankful she is.

God's forgiveness is just as available for us as it was to her. Our deeds are still as hurtful to our God as hers were. And yet God welcomes us through the doors of his house, too, and grants us pardon.

Rowan Williams, the former archbishop of Canterbury, once said in a book he wrote: "God is the ultimate victim of all human cruelty: God bleeds for every human wound. Inasmuch as we do good or ill to any human person, it is done to God. Forgiveness is not only a matter to be settled among ourselves--or left unsettled because of our inadequacies. It is God's affair, too. And the good news of Christianity is that, since God suffers human pain, since God is the victim of human injury, then there is beyond all our

sin a love that is inexhaustible. God's love for this creation never comes to a point where it can take no more.”

There was love for this woman inside the Pharisee’s house, and there is love for each of us—no matter the recurring acts of our past—in the house of Lord, too.

To celebrate Jesus’ love for her, of course, the woman did not go running out of the house into the night. She performed the ultimate act of gratitude and praise according to the culture of the day. She washed, kissed, and anointed Jesus’ feet. She demonstrated in the most appropriate way the love she had for him.

And we have that same opportunity. Because God’s love for us never runs dry, we can accept the grace of our Lord yet again and set sail on a journey of thanksgiving.

We can’t literally put ointment on Jesus’ feet. But we can do so figuratively. We can show our love for God by putting into practice some sort of worthy gesture, such as practicing forgiveness ourselves. Since God has pardoned us, shouldn’t we also pardon those who have gotten in our way of peace and prosperity? We can also show our love for God by living a more selfless life. Putting the interests of our neighbors in front of ours in a healthy way can be the best example of how we can spill our tears onto the feet of our Lord.

It’s in our DNA, by the way. We can forgive because there’s more than a little godliness in all of us due to where we’ve come from.

I came across a poem that captures the connections we have by being part of God’s family.

*As one generation follows another and families increase in size, traits and personalities perpetuate more than we all realize.*

*Sons seem to turn into fathers and daughters more like their mom. So our likes and dislikes, good and bad, just keep traveling on and on.*

*It's been thought that our environment makes us think and act the way we do—perhaps genetics could play a part and there was an ancestor very much like you.*

*I'm pondering "heredity"; I've found we all seem to have one common denominator. We were all made in the wonderful image of God, our great and loving creator.*

*Do you think, maybe, we all have some good attributes of God, our heavenly father, perhaps a special one or two bestowed on each son and each daughter?*

*So, if I truly and sincerely look for God, I'll find a bit of him in you. In doing so, perhaps you'll see in me, some of Him shining through.*

*And when our lifetime stay on earth is done and at the time of our demise, how great to be remembered as seeing through our Heavenly Father's eyes. (John Perrin)*

When we accept the forgiveness God offers, we are freed and compelled to love and cherish the lives we have. And that's when we're seeing through our Heavenly Father's eyes. It's God rubbing off on us. And then, out of appreciation, comes a gesture—maybe not on the same scale as this woman's—that is reflective of this connection God has with us.

Imagine this scenario: It's dinnertime and the family is called to the table. The kids have been outside playing in the sandbox and are hungry. They bolt into the house, sit down

and start to fill their plates to eat while Mom is still getting things on the table. She notices they have not washed their hands and sends them to go wash their hands before dinner. Grudgingly, they do but return with grumpy attitudes because they managed to get in a fight while washing their hands.

Rewind. Take two. It's dinnertime, and the family is called to the table. The kids have been playing outside in the sandbox and are hungry. They bolt into the house and remember to go wash their hands before sitting down at the table to wait for everyone. The meal begins and pleasant dinner conversation follows.

Which scenario can you identify with? The children ignoring their dirty hands and rushing to the table, or the children willingly washing their hands before a meal?

We can probably relate to both. We've rushed in dirty to a meal many times, but we've also remembered to wash first. While the Lord lovingly accepts us as we are, our part is to continually seek a better way. And that usually comes with a posture of repentance and gratitude.

The uninvited guest at this banquet in Luke 7 came to the table in appreciation and in awe, and she found new life and greater love.