

SERMON

First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 7:36-8:3

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CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, I have these four old sleds that have been standing around our house for years. We bought them for our kids when they were little. We had lots of fun with them back then. Now our youngest child is 27 years old. I haven't slid down a hill on one of these sleds for over ten years. Why do I keep them?

Maybe I should do something with them instead of just letting them stand in the storage shed? What could I do with them? I could **throw them in the dump**. That would be a waste and pollution. I could sell them in a **garage sale**. That would maybe get some money for me. Or, I could just **give them to someone who might use them**. That's what I'm going to try first. After worship today, whoever would like to have one of these sleds can come up and take one home.

Kids, lots of times we keep things that we don't need anymore. Sometimes we keep **good things** like my sleds. Sometimes we keep **bad things** like hurt feelings or anger or jealousy. What should we do with the bad things in our lives? Get rid of them right? If we have hurt feelings, anger or jealousy – those don't help us at all do they? No! They don't help anyone else either.

So, how can we get rid of bad things like that? We need to start by asking Jesus to help us. We need to ask Jesus to give us the **faith**, the **courage** and the **strength** to let go of the problems, pain, sickness or whatever else is bothering us each day. Can God help us to let go of bad things? Yes. Jesus can help us to **forgive**, to **apologize**, to **fix problems**, to **dump them in the garbage**, to **ask others for help**...

God will help us to **get rid of good, old sleds** and God will help us to **get rid of bad stuff too**. And our **world will be a better place**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

I have talked to some people during the past weeks who had some things to set down. They were carrying some **heavy burdens** – chemical, legal, money, job, grief, health and family... Some of the burdens we carry are of our own doing. Some of our problems are from people who have victimized us. Other problems have fallen upon us from natural causes... **We often find ourselves carrying some heavy burdens...**

Jesus was invited to attend a fine banquet. While he reclined there at the host's table, a "**woman in the city,**" "**a sinner**" snuck into the dining room and knelt at Jesus' feet. Uninvited, unescorted, immodest – surely she was a bad woman, some think maybe a prostitute. There she came, having heard that Jesus was present, and proceeded to **weep** over his feet, **wash** them with her tears and then **dry** them with her hair. Then she **kissed** and **anointed** his feet with ointment.

This hurting, emotionally broken woman must have been **very determined** to come and see Jesus. She had to be very **courageous** to barge into the presence of respected citizenry and make such a scene. This sinful woman even touching Jesus makes him "**unclean**" accordingly to Jewish religious law. It seems like she may already have been exposed to Jesus. It may be that he had already spoken gracious words to her prior to this moment.

The Pharisee host sees this woman as **scum**. He determines that **Jesus must not really be a man of God** or else he would have stopped the woman's wicked actions. **Reading the host's mind,** Jesus said to him, "**Simon, I have something to say to you.**" "**Teacher,**" he replied, "**speak.**"

"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon answered, “**I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.**” And Jesus said to him, “**You have judged rightly.**” Simon “**supposed**” that the person forgiven **10 times as much debt** would be more appreciative? That would have been over one year’s wages forgiven. Jesus goes on to explain to Simon that this woman’s lavish display of love, thanksgiving and praise for Jesus comes as a natural response to the love and forgiveness that she has already received from God. She has been **loved and forgiven unconditionally** and now she is **overflowing with thankfulness to God.**

On the other hand, Simon, your poor hosting – no foot washing, no kiss, no anointing - normal Jewish hospitality – these are indicative of the fact that you **don’t know much about the love and forgiveness of God...** When we truly taste the love, compassion and mercy of God, it does something to us. It impacts upon how we live our lives in relationship to God and to the people around us. First comes God’s free and undeserved love and forgiveness, and then flows that same kind of love and forgiveness out of us back to God, to neighbor and world.

Then Jesus turned and said to the woman, “**Your sins are forgiven.**” She had uttered no words, yet her **generous and loving actions revealed her heart.** The same was true for the Pharisee, Simon. **His heart was also revealed by his cheap and selfish actions.** The woman had nothing to claim, yet she received what she needed most – forgiveness and a new start on life. The Pharisee had everything going for him, **asked for nothing** and **that’s what he received – nothing**

Meanwhile the woman of the city, the sinner, was set free to go back to living with a fresh start, in a new day, where God continues to faithfully work to give her joy and abundant life. As for the banquet host, there is a saying – “**The person wrapped up in themselves is a very small package.**” The woman took the risk to bring her burden to Jesus and then he **carried it and her...** She was **wrapped up in the arms of God’s love.**

I talked to some people who had some things to set down. What about you? Do you know something about some heavy, maybe painful burdens?

- You may be keeping it to yourself...
- The neighbor may not know or care...
- It may be very old and chronic, or new and piercing...
- You may feel like you should be able to handle it yourself...
- You may feel like you're all alone in the world...
- You may feel like your life is out of control...

"Out of control" - that's good! That's good because that's what often has to happen before people can **"let go and let God"** help.

"It's okay to be sick, because then you can start to get well." That is an old Alcoholics Anonymous saying. **"It's okay to be sick, because then you can start to get well."** Until you recognize and own up to the trouble in your life, you will be powerless to overcome it. Once you admit that you are struggling with something, then you can start to experience help and healing. Do you have some sort of trouble in your life or family? Is it of your own doing? Have you been victimized? Jesus says, **"Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest, for my yolk is easy and my burden is light."** Are you ashamed to share your burden? Could God possibly forgive or help? Jesus says from the cross, **"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."** Jesus said that when we were killing him. I can't imagine any worse offense than that.

The guy who gave the banquet figured that he had his life all together, yet he didn't know how to live or love like Jesus. He was on his own. The sinful woman, supposedly written off and hopeless, found love and life from God himself – trusting, forgiven, alive again, free again...

Got a problem? Jesus has been moving there already to invite you to share it with him... Could you use some help? Jesus is ready... Maybe you could use a cure, a turnabout? Surely we all need forgiveness. Most surely, what will happen is that you **won't have to face that problem alone.** And **God will walk with you to the other side.**

Some people set down their burdens during the past few weeks, at the feet of Jesus. Jesus loves, cares and is moving to bring about the best good in our lives and world. It doesn't matter if it's this, that or the other thing that we are struggling with.

- Everyone **tries to do it alone.**
- Everyone **could use some help.**
- Everyone **needs God's loving, merciful and compassionate help.**

The only questions left are:

1. Do you see the **need for God in your daily life?**
2. Have you **checked lately to see if God is there?**

Let God share your load... Jesus has already started to **lift it and to lift you.**

3. **And when you and Jesus get to the other side, how will we see God's love reflected in and through you?**

Thanks be to God. Amen.