

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 7:36-50
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
February 19, 2017

In our gospel text for today, Jesus is invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a particularly devoted religious group within the Jewish community. They had taken it upon themselves to help their people to be faithful in keeping the Ten Commandments. The Pharisees were fearful that the Jewish faith was in danger of being lost. They felt that it was critical that all the people work at keeping every detail of the Jewish law. Now **Jesus** appeared and seemed to be calling into question some of the Pharisees' long-held beliefs about God. This Pharisee, "**Simon**," invited Jesus to dinner in his home. He probably wanted to see for himself what this teacher was saying and doing. In last week's text we heard the accusation that Jesus was a **drunkard and a glutton** who hung around with hated **tax collectors and sinners**. Maybe some of that was true. . .

While the meal was getting underway, a "**woman in the city, who was a sinner**," came into Simon's house. Down through history the notion is that she was a **prostitute**. You heard it. She proceeded to kneel at Jesus' feet, weep, wet his feet with her tears, dry them with her hair and then anoint them with costly ointment. Some theologians say that this was a foretaste of **preparation for Jesus' approaching death**. Others say that this was a **celebration of Jesus' life and the hope he brought**. You heard the story. Simon, the Pharisee, was aghast that Jesus allowed her, this sinner, to touch him. Jesus read some minds that day. He knew **Simon's judgmental thoughts**. He also knew the **woman's confessional thoughts** and her **thoughts of thanksgiving and praise**.

This woman, so lowly that she doesn't even get a name in our text, **needed Jesus' love and forgiveness**, while Simon was **attacking Jesus' love and forgiveness**. Simon figured that he had his act together and that he was doing everything necessary to be a good Jewish believer in God. The woman knew that she was a sinner and needed God's mercy, love and compassion in order to be set

free to live in God's peace. **Simon could point to his own righteous life and actions. The woman could only point to Jesus.**

There it is. **The Gospel**, the Good News of God's great love for all people through Jesus is not about **how we feel about God**. It is about **how God feels about us**. **The Gospel is not about you. The Gospel is about Jesus!** Jesus **came for both the Pharisee and the prostitute**. Jesus talked **forgiveness** to Simon. Jesus asked Simon about two people who owed a certain man some money. The first person owed him 500 days pay and the second 50 days pay. If the man forgave the debt of both people, **which**, Jesus asked Simon, would "**love him more?**" You know the answer. So did Simon. Anyone would expect, the **bigger the debt forgiven**, the **greater the forgiveness, mercy and compassion received**, the **more the person would appreciate/love the one who canceled the debts**.

Jesus is invited into the **respected Pharisee's** home and the man shows Jesus little of the customary hospitality of Jewish living. Meanwhile, a **despised woman** comes in and literally pours her tears, expensive ointment and heart out to **welcome Jesus into her life**, and to **thank and praise him** for bringing **God's love and forgiveness** into her world. Who needs Jesus if your life is going just fine and you are taking good care of the business of living? The Pharisees thought that living as a child of God **meant being good and faithful**. The sinful woman discovered that living as a child of God is **far more about being loved, forgiven and cared for by a good and faithful God**.

Salvation is found in a **love/trust relationship with Jesus**, not in our exemplary behavior. Jesus told self-righteous Simon, "**Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she was shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.**"

Too many people think that salvation is all about **getting to go to heaven when you die**. When an unchurched person dies, their relatives often spend time telling the pastor about what a good person they were. They say that the dead

person “**believed in God.**” Like they had the **right information.** Like they knew the **secret password.** Too many people think that there is **some sort of a test** to pass in order to get into heaven. The woman in our text **flunked all of the religious tests** of her day. She deserved nothing from God and she knew it. Yet in Christ she met the **grace of God** which is the **only way that any of us will get to go to heaven when we die.** In Christ she met salvation face to face. Jesus told her, “**Your sins are forgiven. . . Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**” **Sin** is anything that separates us from God, neighbor or creation. **Salvation** is God’s work to heal/make whole those same relationships – with God, neighbor and creation. While the Pharisee, Simon, was **trying to build a ladder to God in heaven,** the sinful woman was **meeting God in the flesh,** right there in Simon’s house. And when we meet Jesus, we start to taste and live in the **peace** which God alone can give in this **far-less-than-perfect world.**

There is a banquet going on here again today. Jesus is the host. The life-giving power of this meal rests in the hands of Jesus. Being here today is not about you or I being a little religious once in a while – hopefully enough to make it to heaven. Being here is about Jesus welcoming sinners to God’s heavenly banqueting table right now. Salvation begins right now – not in keeping the Ten Commandments or in being a good person. **Salvation happens** when **Jesus fully embraces broken, sinful people** and says, “**I still love you. You are mine. I will never let you go.**” Salvation happens **when we finally realize** that God is as close to us as the Holy Spirit planted in our hearts at Baptism. That God is as close to us as Jesus’ own Body and Blood poured out to make us new, fresh and clean again and again and forever. Jesus came for both Simon and the prostitute.

Lots of people die in car accidents, at home and in hospitals. **Not too many die** in worship services/Bible studies. **And lots of people find life** here. **They find Jesus here.** And Jesus gives life to sinners, one day at a time, now and forever.

Simon, the Pharisee, invited Jesus to **come and get grilled**. The **prostitute**, or whatever she was, came to Jesus for **forgiveness and a fresh start** in her relationship with God and the world she lived in. **Why have you come here?**

- To welcome Jesus into your life?
- To receive God's amazing, undeserved love?
- To seek help with a need in your life?
- To give thanks and praise to the One who has given you every good gift?
- To be renewed and equipped to live your life to the fullest each day?

Is worship for you, a **life-giving habit**, or a **religious obligation**? Is faith about **your life resting in the hands of God**? Or is it about doing some religious stuff once in a while when it's convenient? God doesn't need us to worship. We need to worship. When we worship together, Jesus promises to fill the great big hole in our hearts with love, forgiveness, healing, joy and peace. We don't have to wait for heaven to receive everything that God has to offer us. Jesus is here right now.

I visited **Juanita Nolan** this week. She has been pretty much home bound due to some health issues. Her beloved husband also died a while back. She misses him deeply. She also misses being here with her sisters and brothers in Christ. Juanita made it very clear to me how much she appreciates being able to join us for worship each Sunday via our **radio broadcast**. She appreciates receiving the bulletin in the mail so she can follow along. Juanita tries to stand whenever we stand up, sits when we sit down. She sings along for the hymns. That's, she says, when her two dogs run and hide. Juanita feels like she is here with us when she reaches out her hands as we join hands for the Lord's Prayer. She knows what it means to receive the good gifts that Jesus offers to all God's people when we worship together.

You can come here to try and avoid going to hell when you die. You can try to learn some sort of a secret password for eternity. Or you can come to **grow in the loving embrace of Jesus, here and now, every day for the rest of your life and in heaven forever**. Salvation **isn't about where we're going** when we die. Salvation is about **Who is waiting to receive us** when we die. Salvation is about the One **who is lovingly carrying us right now**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

