

Love, Forgiveness & Faith – Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman - 22nd Nov 2015

Reading: Luke 7: 36- 50

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

⁴¹ "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

⁴³ Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "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. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Introduction

This morning I wanted to think about this incident

- And compare it with some other occasions where Jesus encountered 'sinful women'
- I was going to say that this morning I was going to be looking at sinful women.
- But that sound distinctly dodgy

But this incident was dodgy, that is the point

- It was shocking
- It would have quickly become the talk of Capernaum
- The Prophet and the Prostitute!

The poor Pharisee must have been distraught - There went his reputation

- He could hardly hold his head up in the synagogue next week.
- But Jesus seemed remarkably untroubled by it all.

In a way that in itself is quite remarkable

- There are many men, for example, who care about the plight of trafficked women
- Would campaign and financially support their rescue from prostitution and slavery
- But how many would happily walk down the high street arm in arm with one
- Or be seen chatting in a coffee shop.
- Let alone have their feet washed by her tears and dried with her hair.

The whole situation is bizarre

- We wonder where this woman came from
- What had happened to cause such an outpouring of emotion
- Jesus explains it as a response to being forgiven much.
- The extravagance of her actions being in proportion to the forgiveness received.

This morning I want to think about this woman's response to Jesus

- Looking at Love, Forgiveness and Faith.
- Then thinking about how we, who have also been forgiven, should also love Him.

But before we do this I want to speculate a little on the events preceding this spectacle

- Because it feels we have come in half way through a drama.
- We see the woman responding to forgiveness
- But what happened to elicit this response.

Jesus' response to the woman

As I have said this is speculation

- We don't know what happened
- But we do know how he treated other women in similar circumstances

At the time of these events Jesus was becoming well known in the region

- As a prophet and itinerant preacher
- He had caused quite a stir in the region with healings and miracles
- Enough to arouse the interest and suspicion of the religious leaders.

One of their repeated criticisms was the company he kept

- They objected to his spending time with the dregs of society –
- Namely tax collectors and sinners.
- Immediately before this story of the sinful women Jesus laments their attitude
"For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'³⁴ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'³⁵ But wisdom is proved right by all her children." (Luke 7:33-35)

This was an ongoing concern in Jesus ministry

- Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Jesus' reply to this complaint
- If we look at Marks account (Mark 2:15-17)

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

In Luke Jesus elaborates on this with a parable (Luke 15:1-7)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbour's together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

So here is the first clue to the woman's response

- Jesus treated her as valuable and precious
- He offered more than welcome and respect
- He believed she was important enough to leave the others and come looking for
- And to rejoice over when she was found.

Like a Doctor triaging his patients

- Hers was the greatest need
- She took precedence over others

But there is more to it than this

- There is another famous occasion where Jesus is confronted with a sinful woman
- This time recorded in John's gospel (John 8:2-11)

At dawn he (Jesus) appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

¹¹ "No one, sir," she said

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

This is a fascinating story for lots of reasons

- There is the obvious hypocrisy and sexism of the religious leaders.
- Jesus refusal to get drawn into their trap
- The shame of the accusers – none of whom could claim to be without sin
- And Jesus' refusal to condemn
- Even though he was the only one there who was without sin.

I read something in one of my Youth Work magazines that struck me about this story

- Right at the end of the story Jesus allowed the women to decide her own response.
- The Pharisees were famous for their prescriptive practices.
- They would have told the women exactly which sins to repent off
- Exactly how to live a life free from sin.
- In every pernicky detail

But not Jesus

- He tells her he won't condemn her and then to leave her life of sin.
- But lets her decide for herself what her sin is.
- It is her own conscience
- Plus maybe the prompting of the Holy Spirit to convict her about what to change.
- What her response was – we don't know
- But could it have been similar to the woman at the meal
- Coming with tears of love and gratitude to wash Jesus' feet.
- It's certainly possible.

I think there is an important point here

- Neither of these women set out to be 'sinful'
- They didn't sit at school and say "When I grow up want to be a prostitute"
- Life doesn't happen like that
- Our hope and dreams are crushed and marred by the world
- And we end up in places we did not wish to be

Maybe they were there because of economic necessity borne from desperation

- Maybe they had been abused or deceived
- Maybe they had made unwise choices and became trapped by their own reputation
- The point is we don't know
- Therefore it is not for us to judge their motives or sinfulness

We can know the actions that are wrong

- But the person needs rescuing – not condemning
- Mostly we are good enough at condemning ourselves without others doing it for us.

I found this quite challenging

- We obviously want people to come to know Jesus
- To receive forgiveness and new life
- But do we want to settle for being a minor injuries unit?
- Or are we willing to get our hands dirty and be a full blown A&E.

There was a famous missionary called CT Stud.

- He had a saying that *“Some like to live within the sound of church or chapel bell, but I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell”*
- And when people do come – will we let them work out their sins according to God’s prompting
- Or will we instruct them on how to become like us and fit in?

The woman’s response to Jesus

So we’ve looked at how Jesus treated the woman

- The love, respect and dignity he gave her
- The forgiveness he could offer
- The release from the chains of shame, guilt and habit.

Now let’s look at the woman’s response

- I’ve noted three things - Love, Forgiveness & Faith
- Initially I planned to talk about these separately as three points
- But actually I found that really difficult to do
- They are just too interlinked

Jesus tells Simon the Pharisee this wonderful parable about owing money

- The person who is forgiven the larger debt is the most grateful
- The message is clear
- Because her sins were massive to her
- Because she looked at herself with shame
- So the amazement that Jesus would forgive her
- That she could be made whole and righteous by him
- Just blew her away
- And she was overwhelmed with love for him

As we read in verses 47-50

Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

⁴⁸ *Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”*

⁴⁹ *The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”*

⁵⁰ *Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

So was she saved by her love or by faith?

- Actually she was saved by Jesus
- He forgave her and paid for her by His death
- Her faith allowed her to believe and trust in that forgiveness
- And her love and gratitude was the emotional response to what He had done for her.

Love is the response to what Jesus has done

- Faith is the trust in what he has done
- The two are intrinsically linked
- John makes this point in his first letter

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1 John 4:15-16)

We know we are saved by faith

- But when Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment
- He didn't say have faith
- But to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* (Matt 22:37)
- *"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* (Matt 22:39-40)

When John gave Jesus' message to the Ephesian church in Revelation

- He applauded their hard work and perseverance
 - He was pleased with their holding to the truth
 - But what upset him was their loss of love
- ⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. (Rev. 2:4-5)*

This is serious stuff

- The lampstand symbolises God's Spirit
- And it will be lost to the church if they don't return their first love
- As with most of God's judgements it is really about consequences
- If we lose our love we end up just following traditions and rules
- We are then no longer open to the Spirit
- And church becomes hollow and empty

But how do we Love God?

- Not all of us find it easy to show emotion
- And surely love is more than just emotion anyway.
- I want to finish by thinking about how to love God.

Conclusion - How to Love God

And I want to think about three things

- How do we
 1. Show love,
 2. Sustain love
 3. Share love

1. How do we show love?

In the Marriage course Nicky and Sila Lee talk about different languages of love

- They suggest we show love in different ways depending on our character and background.
- Part of their course is helping couples to know how their partner shows love
- And what to do to make their partner feel loved.

They talk about

- Loving words
- Kind actions
- Quality time
- Thoughtful presents
- Physical affection

I would suggest it is not so different with God

- There are different ways of showing our love for Him
- I guess the woman in the story went with physical affection
- Obviously Jesus is no longer physically with us
- But we can show our love by word in worship.
- In spending time with Him in prayer and reading the Bible
- In giving.
- And in actions of service and obedience

On the night before his death Jesus shares some last thoughts with His disciples

- *Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. (John 14:23)*

Obviously Jesus is no longer physically with us

- But we can love him by loving others
- In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats the sheep ask
'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'
⁴⁵ *"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'* (Matt. 25:44-45)
- John tells us
We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. (1John 4:19-21)

2. How do we sustain Love?

Again I'm going to borrow from the marriage course

- We need to make a conscious effort to keep our love for Jesus strong
- It won't just happen we need to work at it

- To make time to remind ourselves who He is and what He has done for us
- To be determined in spending time with him
- To be diligent in meeting together in worship

In the letter to the Hebrews we are encouraged to keep doing these things

²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:22-25)

And finally

3. How do we share love?

I want to end with the story of another woman Jesus met

- She was out at midday to avoid the rejection of her neighbours because of her lifestyle
- But Jesus spoke to her
- Offered her living water and new life (John 4:28-30 & 39-42)

²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.....

⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers.

⁴² They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”

When we are full of the love God gives us

- Then we have something to share
- When Jesus sent his disciples out to spread the good news he told them
“As you go, proclaim this message: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.” (Matthew 10:7-9)

Amen