

Luke 7:36-8:3

Jesus and the Woman Who Loved Much

One who is forgiven much, loves much. One who is forgiven little, loves little.

The 14th-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart once wrote:

If the only prayer you say in your whole life is “thank you,” that would suffice.

It begs the question:

What are we thankful for?

To whom are we thanking?

and

What if, your whole life is to be a prayer of thankfulness? How would it look like?

I believe that this woman at the end of Luke chapter 7

had experienced such profound grace

that she could not help but express her gratitude and love for God

Her encounter with Jesus is an example of a life changed,

a life restored to peace

a life responding in worship.

However not everyone responded to Jesus the same way.

The Pharisee dismisses Jesus,

and others simply didn't know what to do with him.

But others respond by following and living graciously.

But lets recap what's been happening.

Traveling prophet, preacher, and miracle worker, Jesus of Nazareth,

was having dinner at a one of the Pharisees' home.

News about him was spreading all around Capernaum

and now he was in the city of Nain.

He was healing the sick,

casting out demons

... even raised a widow's young son from the dead.

A group of people was traveling with him, they were his disciples,

a motley crew of men consisting of:

fishermen

a tax collector,

and a religious zealot.

Crowds were following him, not just the sick, but also the learned

teachers of the Law,

scribes

and Pharisees.

This Jewish man from Nazareth was saying some strange things.

Disturbing things, especially those in religious and political power.

Things like how He's been appointed by the Lord
to preach good news to the poor,
proclaim release to the captives,
sight to the blind,
and freedom to the oppressed.

He keeps talking about this "Kingdom of God" and how it has come.

Even John the Baptist was wondering about this Jesus, his cousin.

Could he be the One?

Could he possibly be the Messiah,
the expected One whom he's been shouting about in the desert for so many years?

Who is this man?

Whether by curiosity or respect, one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dine at his home.
It was probably a large feast, a formal banquet, with many guests and servants.
The social custom of the day would have allowed needy people to come and receive leftovers.
Word did get around.

For while Jesus reclined at the table, his head towards the table and his feet pointed away,
a woman from the city appears from behind.

She's weeping.

Without saying anything, she approaches Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfumed ointment.
She kneels,
bends her neck such that the tears from her eyes dropped on his soiled and calloused feet,
and wipes them clean with her long, unbound hair.
She rubs ointment on his feet, continuously kissing them, while the scent fills the room.

What audacity!

The Pharisee describes her as "a sinner," someone who is impure, unclean,
and because she had her hair down to wipe Jesus feet, scholars believe that this
seem to indicate that she was a courtesan or prostitute;
these gestures may have been regarded as erotic.

Perhaps she was a prostitute by vocation,
perhaps she was forced into it either through slavery
or because her husband died and left her destitute.

However, some speculate that she was a wealthy woman (to afford the perfume)
She could have been labeled a sinner for many reasons, including being ill, disabled,
Or be in frequent contact with Gentiles

We don't know exactly what she did,
We don't know her name, her background, what was her "sin."
And at this point of the narrative
we also don't know what exactly has led her here to this table.

But her very presence would have been a cause of unease,
she was a source of defilement in a room of the ritually pure, the observers of the Law.

The Pharisee was indignant.

He thinks to himself: if Jesus was really a prophet,

he would know what **sort** of woman this woman is.
A real prophet of God would certainly not allow a dirty person, a woman, to touch him.
A real prophet would not need me, or anyone else, to tell him **who** this woman is,
and why she doesn't belong here, let alone disturb our meal.
A real prophet would maintain his distance from this sinner, for she's up to no good.
This is highly inappropriate... how shameful, how embarrassing, how.....

"Simon, I have something to say to you." Hearing his name startles Simon's thoughts.
"Tell me, Teacher."

Jesus tells a parable about a moneylender and two debtors.
And when he asks Simon which one would love the moneylender more,
Simon **half-heartedly answers**, "I suppose, the one whom he forgave more."
Meaning, the one whose larger debt was forgiven would love the moneylender more.

It makes sense, no? That the one owing over a year's salary would be more thankful than the one owing just a couple of months.

Simon was able to judge that story correctly.

And he was right to believe that a prophet would know what kind of woman this is...
but Simon was wrong about the woman, and wrong about Jesus.

Jesus turns to the woman and proceeds to compare the woman's actions to Simon's.

She washed Jesus' feet by wetting them with her tears and
used her hair as a towel

while Simon provided no water

She's been kissing his feet continuously
while Simon offered no kiss of greeting

She anointed his feet with her own costly perfume
while Simon did not anoint his head with oil

She fulfills the role expected of Simon as host.

Her actions went above and beyond what any good host would do.

By contrast, Simon behaved appropriately according to social norms.

But just appropriately.

While he believed Jesus was ritually pure enough to have dinner with him,

Simon saw little in Jesus to impress or honor him.

This woman, this sinner, has shown greater hospitality than Simon.

What shame indeed.

But all Simon saw was a sinner, a woman of ill-repute being a nuisance,
or trying to get people's attention.

Jesus saw someone else.

Jesus saw a woman saved by grace.

TNIV: her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown

The verb tense for "forgiven" is perfect, meaning that it has been completed
with results continuing in the present

Jesus saw a woman displaying her love to the One who has forgiven her,

to the One who has shown mercy.
And by telling the parable Jesus sought to teach Simon
and ask him to reconsider the nature of her actions.

Simon, do you see this woman?
She has done all these things that you ought to have done.
Here is a woman who has experienced transformation.
Here is a woman who has experienced healing.
Simon, don't you see?
Here is a woman who has experienced much forgiveness.
Here is a woman whose actions speak of much love.
Simon, don't you see?
Simon, don't you see a woman who loves or do you just see a sinner?

This is why I object to the headings used in the NIV: “Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman.”
Well, actually, Jesus said that she loved much, and never once referred to her as a sinner.
And unlike the other gospels where a similar account is placed near Jesus’ crucifixion,
Luke records this “anointing” near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry,
where her actions are signs of love – not consecration.
In fact, this is the first account in Luke of physical worship and adoration shown towards
Jesus as a result of forgiveness and grace.
A better heading would be:
“Jesus and the forgiven woman” or “The woman who loved much”
Another scholar suggests: “A woman who shows great love”

He who is forgiven little,
he who has experienced little forgiveness, loves little.

Jesus told another parable recorded in Matthew chapter 18 about a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. The king forgives a servant of a massive debt, ten thousand talents (one talent was worth 15 years of work). But instead of showing the same compassion to others, that servant punishes his fellow workers who owed him a hundred denarii (3 months). It doesn’t make sense, why would someone whose **enormous** debt was canceled, make others pay their debt, which were puny in comparison?

I suspect that the answer is, ingratitude, the lack of thankfulness.
The inability to see how much we’ve been forgiven by God,
how much grace he offers us,
how much he has loved us by going to the cross.
Ingratitude steels our hearts, makes us bitter, and causes envy.
Rather than counting our blessings, we curse the good fortune of others.
Rather than lifting the things of our lives to God in open hands,
we clasp them and hold them tightly to ourselves.
Rather extending grace, we keep it.
I would assert that ingratitude keeps us from fully experiencing grace,
especially on the long road of life

I think of another story I heard once, about a young boy at the age of ten, who needed leg surgery but his family couldn't afford the operation.

When he was 6, he fell and an infection developed in his knee,
and for four years he had several operations,
but it came to a point where a specialist was needed, or his leg would be amputated.
Turns out, a traveling specialist volunteered to do the operation, without charge.
This young boy, got to keep his leg and grew up to fight for universal healthcare.
He was determined that every child's life should not be dependent on the ability of their parents to raise enough funds.

That boy grew up to become a Baptist minister and a politician.
His name was Tommy Douglas, the father of Canadian Medicare.

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Jesus tells the woman that her sins have been forgiven.

They have already been dealt with.

Here, we see some mistranslations:

In Vs 48 it reads: Your sins are forgiven;
but "forgive" is in the same verb tense as in Vs 47, so it should read as in the
NASB: your sins have been forgiven

This suggests a prior acquaintance with Jesus
or that her life had already been touched by the ministry of John
and that's why she came.

But Jesus pronounces it to her, and to everyone else, and it causes more astonishment.

"Who is this who even forgives sin?" thought the people around the table.

He may be a wise teacher, prophet, and healer... but the forgiver of sins?

According to Jewish religion, the debt of sin is due solely to God, so only God can forgive that debt. Their response echo the scribes and the Pharisees response chapter 5:21,
"Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
So who is this? Who is this man?

Without hesitation, Jesus says to the woman, "your faith has saved you; go in peace."

She not only believes that she has been forgiven,

but her actions have shown that she has placed her trust in Him.

She presumed God's mercy.

She went to him, despite all the social and religious boundaries that were in place,
despite the attitude and judgment of the Pharisee,
she sought Jesus and worshiped him.

The question now is whether or not God's people

will recognize her as a woman forgiven, made new and made whole.

Jesus pronounces peace to her. Reconciliation.

Will she be received and restored back into community?

As we've seen, Simon's response was one of judgment and indignation.

Simon presumed the judgment of God.
Instead of seeing the woman, he labels her.
Instead of honoring Jesus, he dismisses him for welcoming the woman.
Simon had not, evidently, experienced the kind of forgiveness
that has marked and changed the life of the woman.

The response around the table was one of astonishment.

They presumed that God cannot be a man,
for how can this man, Jesus, forgive sins committed against God?
They presume that no such authority can be given to a person.
But they have yet to understand the wonder of the Incarnation,
of God entering into humanity,
and into suffering
so that we may know peace.
They raise their eyebrows and question,
and they ask a question that we ourselves should be asking,
Who is this?
Who is this man?
Who is this man to me?
Dare I trust in his authority to forgive? What happens when I do?

Our reading of this story often stops here, because the next chapter begins.

But we miss something extraordinary when we do:
(a good reason to read your bible as a whole books, rather in small segments)

Luke 8

1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Here we continue to see lives responding to Jesus in gratitude and generosity.

in the Greco-roman world, for women to travel with a teacher was extraordinary.
It was remarkable, and to the outsider, this seems kind of dodgy.
But we've already seen extraordinary devotion by one woman, now we see many:
Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna, and many others.

All women who have been healed by Jesus
and now personally supporting them out of their own pocket.

Like Jesus, they are serving others graciously and generously.
Their lives anticipate the early Christian community in Acts, where “no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.”

These women lived a life of thankfulness. They got it. And I would assert that at this point, they understood grace far more than what the twelve understood. The twelve were with Jesus, but the woman gave from the heart.

One who is forgiven much, loves much indeed.

And so we see the various responses: rejection or dismissal by Simon, doubt & astonishment from the people around the table, worship and adoration from the woman... and following/discipleship from other women.

I wonder what happened to the woman who loved much.

What do you do when you've been healed by Jesus,
when you've met him, and got to kiss his feet?
How do you live the rest of your life?

I wonder if she was one of those who followed Jesus, even to his crucifixion.

I wonder if she went back to her family, her community, and talked about Jesus.
I wonder if those around her, broke bread with her, and shared the cup. I wonder.

I wonder too, how different the Church would look if we lived lives of thankfulness.

If others could see, not a community of the religiously pure,
but a community marked by grace.
A community marked by gratitude and generosity,
A community who loves much because **we** have been forgiven much.
And if we do it well, I hope people will begin to ask,
who is this God they're thanking, who is this God they love?

PRAY

Heb 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe..."