

Your Sins are Forgiven!  
Sermon for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50



*One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. <sup>37</sup>And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, <sup>38</sup>and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet anointed them with the ointment. <sup>39</sup>Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." <sup>40</sup>And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." <sup>41</sup>"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup>When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup>Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And He said to him, "You have judged rightly." <sup>44</sup>Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup>You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. <sup>46</sup>You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. <sup>47</sup>Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup>And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." <sup>49</sup>Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup>And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Dear congregation! Luke paints seven scenes for us, seven scenes, like in a film.

Scene 1: A pharisee approaches Jesus: May I invite you to my house for dinner? At first, we don't learn anything else about this. What expectation is behind this invitation? It's unusual because Jesus and the Pharisees didn't have a great friendship. However, Jesus accepts the invitation and sits down, or rather lies down, at the table.

Scene 2: "A woman was in the city..." Luke writes this as if everything had already been said. A sinner. One who was best avoided, someone with whom it was better not to associate. But she had learned that Jesus was in the house of the Pharisee, Simon is his name as we learn later on, and now she grabs a jar of anointing oil and goes to the house of Simon to meet Jesus there.

We suspect that Luke has left out a scene at this point. Something must have happened here before: has she met Jesus before? Has He spoken to her? Has she heard one of His speeches? We don't learn anything about that, but something must have been there. And this "something" must have been the most important thing that has happened to her in her life so far because there she is, the well-known sinner throughout town, and she encountered the love of God in Jesus. In the encounter with Him, she received God's love. That's why she now wants to go to Him at all costs. That's why she doesn't let herself be stopped from going to the Pharisee's house. She knows very well that this could be a humiliating experience for her – she risks being thrown out of there because they don't want to get their fingers dirty with her, the sinner.

Luke doesn't say all this, he writes that she approaches Jesus from behind, that she cries so much that Jesus' feet get all wet from her tears. But she dries them with her hair, and she kisses His feet. Then she pours the anointing oil on His feet and caresses them.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> scene again shows us the host, Simon. Disgusted, he observes what is happening. But mixed with his anger at the embarrassing performance, is triumph – Jesus can't be the prophet, the man of God, that the world thinks He is because then He would know what kind of person was at His feet and Jesus wouldn't allow her to touch Him. He

would push her aside for there was no place for such things in the world of the righteous, the pious, among those who wanted to obey God with earnestness and zeal.

The 4<sup>th</sup> scene shows us that Jesus recognized what was going on inside Simon's head. Maybe you didn't have to be a prophet, maybe you could tell from his face. Simon, I have something to tell you... and then He tells him a story, a story from God. As is so often the case, the story is one that has to do with money. Imagine, Simon, that God is like someone who has loaned money to two men. One a month's wages, the other a whole year's wages. Now the moneylender wants his money back, but both men are empty-handed, neither of them can pay their debts. Now imagine, this moneylender gives both of these men what they owe him. What do you think, Simon? Which of the two debtors will be more grateful to the moneylender? Which one will love him the most?

Simon isn't quite sure where this is going. What did the story have to do with this woman? Or with him? In any case, it was clear that the person who had been forgiven the greater debt would be more grateful. He would feel greater love and gratitude. Exactly, Jesus answered him, that's exactly how I see it too. Now look what has just happened here, what this woman did, what do you think that was? You, Simon, invited me to your house, but you didn't give me any water for my dusty feet, as would have been appropriate for a guest. Nor did you give me a welcome kiss. And you didn't anoint my head with oil either. You invited me into your house, but you haven't honored me like a guest. But this woman, she has showered Me with her love. Why do you think that is? "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." To you, our encounter means nothing; but she, on the other hand, soaks up God's love like a sponge. She is like a person dying of thirst who finally receives water.

The next scene is very short, but it packs a punch because now Jesus addresses the woman, finally with the redeeming Word. Now He finally tells her exactly what she has been feeling all along, what her heart has longed for, what her whole body has hungered after: "Your sins are forgiven." She was a well-known sinner, that was her trademark, that was how people saw her, and how they always would view her. She probably could only see herself in this way too, as one who was no good, rejected by everyone, as someone who could expect nothing good from God or man. But now, Jesus says to her: God loves you, and He makes you pure and good. You may live and be with God where you will be loved and respected. This is your dignity, your beauty. Your sins are forgiven.

Just one small sentence but it caused excitement among those who were sitting at the table. Luke hadn't mentioned them as of yet, but now they come into view: "Who is this who also forgives sins?" That is the all-important question. So far, I have always spoken of God's love. But the woman connected this love with Jesus. She kissed and anointed His feet because He is God's love in person. No one has ever seen God, but in Jesus, God Himself came into contact with her. His Word was God's Word, His absolution was God's absolution. All the love she could feel for God, she gave to Him. Who is He that also forgives sins? None other than God Himself! She felt that, and she believed that with all her heart. Luke doesn't tell whether the others who asked themselves who He was ever found an answer. The question remains open in the room. At least for the others... but not for this woman. She found her answer by now when Jesus said to her: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Amen.