

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Second Sunday after Trinity, July 3, 2011**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 392, 386:1, 382, 380, 378.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 11:26- 12:15, Galatians 2:11-21, Luke 5:17-26.

Sermon Text: Luke 7:36-50.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Who is going to be more grateful? One who has a huge debt forgiven or one who has a small debt forgiven? Jesus answers that question today.

But even more important is the forgiveness not of an earthly debt, but the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins is something that only God can do. But in Jewish life, announcement of the forgiveness of sins was normally the role of the priests.

We, of course, recognize that God is the one who forgives sins, but also that any Christian can and should announce the forgiveness of sins to a penitent sinner. That occurs especially when the pastor announces the forgiveness of sins, not on his own account, but in the name of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And the pastor does it because that is what the Christian congregation has called him to do in their behalf.

Well, among the Jews and the especially among the Pharisees, Jesus had a reputation or an image that made the Pharisees question who Jesus was and what authority he had. What was Jesus' reputation? Luke records at least once previously that Jesus had forgiven sins publicly. We read in Luke 5:21: "*The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, 'Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'*" In today's text, we find Jesus again announcing the forgiveness of sins. Today we hear Jesus telling a Pharisee about

**THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS**

- 1. Jesus forgives the sins of one who is a 'great sinner'**
- 2. Those who think they have no sins are not appreciative of God's forgiveness.**

Simon the Pharisee had invited Jesus to have dinner at his house. But we must be reminded, as Luke told us in the previous chapter, that "*The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.*" Luke 6:7. Obviously this was a rather public occasion, because there was a woman who also appeared and there is no specific mention that Simon the Pharisee invited her. The woman at Jesus' feet had a bad reputation in that town. Jesus obviously had a reputation, too, as one who proclaimed the forgiveness of sins, something that many thought he had no authority to do.

We must begin with an explanation of dining at a table in Jesus' day. Formal dining wasn't done by sitting on chairs at a table as we do, but reclining on couches with one's feet away from the table.

We read: "*When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and 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.*" This woman brought perfume and she was weeping. Remember that Jesus, as God's omniscient Son, knew everything, including her thoughts AND he knew the thoughts of all the people there, including the Pharisees. Jesus as well as the others present, could see her weeping.

"*When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, [the woman treating Jesus in this way] 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.'*" Scripture says that he said this to himself. There is no evidence that anyone heard him.

The Pharisee, who is later named, also concludes that Jesus wouldn't be much of a prophet if he didn't know what kind of woman was honoring him, and if he did know what kind of woman she were, would have nothing to do with her. We can just imagine the Pharisee telling the 'wicked woman' to get away from him, because he wasn't a sinner as evil as her.

Jesus "**answered**" what Simon was thinking what he was talking to himself. Our text tells us "**Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said.**"

Jesus tells Simon – and all who were listening – a very important point by telling a parable. "**Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, [duh-`nar-e-e] and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.**" The King James Version uses the word "penny" but the New International Version word describes the Greek coin better, and when you realize that the Greek denarius – plural denarii – is the amount of a working man's daily wages, as was the English "penny" in 1611 when the King James Version was translated, you realize that we are talking about nearly two years wages – 500 denarii. The other owed only two months wages. When neither had the money to pay the moneylender back, he canceled the debts of both. Then comes the question Jesus asks to make his application: "**Now which of them will love him more?"** Who will be more appreciative of the canceling of his debt? Simon correctly answers that the bigger the debt that is canceled, the greater the debtor would have opportunity to love the person who cancels the debt.

Simon answers correctly with "**I suppose**", as if he knew where the parable was going, and suspected the point that Jesus was going to make. He said 'I suppose, I assume' that the one with the larger debt will be more appreciative of the debt being cancelled. The tone of this suggests that he recognizes that this woman knew she was a terribly wicked person – and surely didn't think of herself as a good person as Pharisees typically did – and if Simon was a typical Pharisee, he thought himself a pretty good person, and really didn't think that he had many sins that he needed forgiveness for. The words suggest that he didn't want to recognize his own faults as a sinner, because Pharisees took great pride in obeying the letter of the law – including the man-made laws that the Jews had added to the law of God – even if they didn't really obey the spirit of the law of God.

Jesus makes application to the forgiveness of sins. One who has more sin forgiven has greater reason to love the one who forgives the sins – God. The bigger the debt cancelled, the more one will love the one who cancelled the debt.

Jesus turns to the woman and uses her to illustrate Simon's lack of honor and respect for Jesus – as well as his lack of admission of his own sinfulness – and this woman's great appreciation and love toward God for the forgiveness of sins which God gives. He upbraids or admonishes Simon. Look at her and what she did, and look what you did for me. "**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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.'**"

Sure, you invited me to your home for dinner. But you gave me no water to wash my feet, you didn't greet me with a kiss, a common Jewish greeting. You did not put oil on my head to honor me. You gave me no honor though you invited me to dinner.

"**She wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ... this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.**" She wet my feet with tears, wiped my feet with her hair, hasn't stopped kissing my feet, she poured perfume on my feet, not my head. She humbled, humiliated herself in this way. The hair of a woman is her glory, and the feet are the lowest part of a human. In her shame she wouldn't dare to anoint Jesus' head with perfume.

"**Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.**" Then Jesus said to her, "**Your sins are forgiven.**"

Jesus' conclusion is: THEREFORE I tell you, and all who read and hear of this history: her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much. Despite the wording of most English translations, the original Greek is plain that her sins are not forgiven BECAUSE, or "FOR" she loved much. A better translation would be that

“her many sins have been forgiven with the result that she loved much” or “so that” she loved much. The second sentence “***But he who has been forgiven little loves little***” makes that clear. The forgiving comes first, then the loving. P. E. Kretzmann’s commentary makes this plain: “her many grievous trespasses had found forgiveness in the sight of Christ and God filled her heart with joyful love, which she was constrained to show by her outward behavior. The forgiveness was not the result of the love, but the love followed and flowed out of the forgiveness, just as the sun does not shine because it is light outside, but it is light because the sun shines. [The parable in our text] shows clearly that love follows out of faith. Therefore, when one has forgiveness of sins and believes, there faith follows. Where one does not have forgiveness, there is no love.”

Simon's lack of love proved that he had no forgiveness and, in fact, cared nothing about forgiveness in his proud Pharisaic mind. But to the woman Jesus now said: “***Your sins are forgiven.***” This word of forgiveness from the Savior's mouth was the seal and assurance of her forgiveness. It was the word which fanned the glow of her faith into a rich fire.

Though the other guests did not like the words of Jesus, He continued in His kind assurance to this woman. Her faith, which she had proved by her love, had saved her. Through her faith she had accepted the redemption of Jesus and she was a blessed child of salvation. Here is another example of the truth of God’s boundless grace, as we learn from Romans 5:20: “***But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.***”

Here another person on the fringes of society, a woman who had lived a sinful life, proves her great faith by her love. Faith saves; but faith is never alone. A living faith will demonstrate itself by love for the Savior. This woman chose to show her love in a unique and unusual way. Everyone who has truly experienced the forgiveness of sins will find ways to show love for Jesus.

But the other guests began to murmur: “***The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’***” ‘Who is this who pretends and supposes he can forgive sins?’ This criticism of Jesus continued until his crucifixion, in which the forgiveness of sins was completely paid for when the words “It is finished” were spoken on the cross.

Jesus pointedly tells the woman “***Your sins are forgiven.***” That is the same announcement of forgiveness you should hear in every worship service in which we join here. You have called your pastor to announce unto you the forgiveness of sins, among other things. Those are words you hear when the pastor announces “Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us, and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins.” (The Lutheran Hymnal, page 6) Those are words you hear when the pastor announces “I, by virtue of my office as a called servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” (The Lutheran Hymnal, page 16)

When we look at this penitent woman and the self-righteous Pharisee, we are reminded that we must approach our forgiving God repenting of our sins, so that the announcement of forgiveness may strike our hearts and take root there. May we firmly believe that we will receive the forgiveness of all our sins and daily from God’s Word be assured of forgiveness.

To you I quote Jesus again today: “***Your faith has saved you; go in peace.***” Amen