

Luke: Breaking the Norm
Sermon 2-10-2019
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Luke 7:36-50

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." ⁴¹"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴Then 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁸Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Manuscript:

The other week there was a reporter who reported that from anonymous sources within the Philadelphia Eagles locker room, that Carson Wentz, the franchise quarterback, was "selfish" and "egotistical." Immediately this became a major story. Questions arose. Everyone had to react to this story. Is this true? Is Carson Wentz a poor teammate? Is there a quarterback controversy between Carson Wentz and Nick Foles? Would the organization need to trade Carson Wentz? And immediately, other players started to defend Carson Wentz as a great

teammate and the future of the Eagles franchise. Publicly, they didn't have anything bad to say about him. As many of you probably know, Carson Wentz is very public about his faith in Christ. He is a devout Christian and tries to use his platform to advance the gospel. So this good boy Christian, how would he react? Everyone is waiting in anticipation for Carson's reaction.

We see this same anticipation in our passage today as the Pharisee, Simon, waits for Jesus' reaction to the woman bathing and anointing Jesus' feet. ³⁶“One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.’” The Pharisee, Simon, is waiting for a particular reaction. Simon expects Jesus to react in a particular way because of his knowledge of the law. In defense of Simon, he's going by what he knows. See, this woman is violating all sorts of social conventions in this scene. In her act of love and gratitude, she sends implied messages that are untrue to Simon and the overseers. She implies that by touching or caressing Jesus's feet that it is sexual in nature. Women never let their hair down in public in the ancient world. And to do so and to use it to bathe His feet is to imply something sexual. The other piece is that this woman was known to be unclean in the community, a sinner. Otherwise, why would Simon have reacted so strongly? Simon knows something about her that supposedly Jesus is ignorant to, in Simon's eyes. Some were saying that Jesus was a prophet. Simon confirms that Jesus is not a prophet because Simon thinks that Jesus should have rejected this woman because she is a sinner and ceremonially unclean. If Jesus knew, prophetically, that this woman was a sinner, He wouldn't let this woman do this.

Jesus' reaction, though, is extremely unexpected. Especially with the last part of our passage. ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Teacher,’ he replied, ‘Speak.’ ⁴¹‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?’ ⁴³Simon answered, ‘I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’” Another social aspect of this scene that you may not understand is that it was very common for guests or hosts to offer a riddle as a way of entertainment of wit and wisdom. What Jesus does fits right in with the actions of a guest. And in this riddle, Simon, the one who was critiquing Jesus, gives the right answer to the riddle. He must be pretty

proud of himself, right? He solved the riddle. But what he fails to recognize is the application to his thought and comment. He doesn't become self-aware of his folly until Jesus points it out. ⁴⁴Then 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.'" Again, there were social expectations of hosting. The expectations that Jesus outlines though, are optional, not required of hosts. These things would be extra-generous gestures. By not exercising these things, Simon reveals his character. Simon is exposed as one who thinks he knows it all and what Jesus should do to the point where Simon is not aware of his faults and doesn't understand his need for forgiveness. Jesus also reveals that He knows more than Simon thought. Jesus knows that this woman was a sinner and had done many things wrong, but her heart was a heart of contrition and remorse. She knew she was a sinner. Either she was forgiven and this is her act of gratitude or this woman needs to be forgiven. So at this point, Jesus reveals that He is indeed a prophet because of what He can see in the woman and in Simon.

This is where Jesus takes it to the next level and blows away everyone's expectations. It's been a surprising interaction for all involved so far, but this takes it to a whole other level. ⁴⁸Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'" Jesus was already pushing the edge for these people, but these last three verses is what pushes them over the edge. Jesus not only sees the hearts of these people, but He claims forgiveness of the woman and the ones who seek it. Why is this such a big deal? Forgiveness is reserved for God alone through sacrifice at the temple according to these people. Jesus violates the ritual practice. He may be a prophet, but to these dinner guests, He is now espousing things that are blasphemous. One of the questions that lingers in our passage is, did the woman come to Jesus because she knew He could forgive her? Or did she come to Him because she was already forgiven and this is the expression of her gratitude? Either could be true.

There is this interconnection to between love and forgiveness. Did she express her love to Jesus in this way because she was forgiven? Or did she seek forgiveness because of how much she knows Jesus loves? Put yourself in the woman's shoes for a second. Imagine that you have done some pretty horrible things. Imagine that you slept with many partners. Imagine that you have stolen

from others. Imagine that you have spoken ill of others. Or any other number of transgressions. Because of the extremeness of Jesus' love, it compels you, or this woman, to seek forgiveness. Have you ever said something wrong? Have you ever sinned against your spouse, your mother, your father, your friend and maybe even your children? Have you ever turned away from God? Disobeying Him? Treating others like crap? The guilt becomes so strong from these transgressions that it motivates us to change. We see love perfectly exemplified in Jesus and it compels us to seek Him. Jesus' love is so great, so merciful and so forgiving that it transforms, drastically and dramatically changes each and everyone of our lives. And because we have experienced the incredibly impact of such love and forgiveness, it compels us also to have much compassion and love for others who also need that same love and forgiveness. If we put ourselves in Simon's shoes, He doesn't realize this, but when he is critical of Jesus and the woman, he reveals where his heart. He reveals that he has not experienced the healing and incredible power of Jesus' love and forgiveness. He did the right things in bringing Jesus into His home, but He doesn't know the right character of God in Jesus. He hasn't experienced the power of God's forgiveness and love and therefore, he can't extend that same forgiveness and love to this woman.

So let me ask you something very basic, do you know that you are a sinner? Do you know that you are a sinner? Do you know that you do wrong things? Do you know that you treat some people like crap sometimes? Do you know that you say the wrong things that hurt, cripple and injure others? Do you know that you have judgment and malice in your heart? This is very basic. If you don't know these things about yourself, or at least know that you are capable of these things, then you are just like Simon. Simon was ignorant of his sin. He lost all awareness of his sin. I would encourage you today to ask the Lord for forgiveness. You know, over the past year or so we've talked about embracing new life in our midst. Some of us have prayed prayers to the Lord for new life to shower upon each and everyone of us. Some of us have prayed for new life here at Providence church. And in some ways the Lord has responded by bringing new life. But here's the thing, the capacity for new life, through Jesus, is equal to our capacity to receive forgiveness. Which means that we have to understand and be aware of the sin in our lives. Because if we understand our deep need for forgiveness in our lives, it leads to deep gratitude in our lives. Deep gratitude leads to generous hearts of love and forgiveness and leads to more new life. Because this woman knew that she had to be forgiven much, her gesture of gratitude was that much greater and therefore loved Jesus all the more.

If we turn to the passage before ours, I think it underscores not only our personal need for Jesus, but our corporate, Providence's, need for Jesus. Jesus says this to the crowd, "³¹To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and

what are they like? ³²They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep.’ ³³For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon’; ³⁴the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ ³⁵Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.” Jesus calls his generation children. In this context, He’s not using it kindly. The people had certain expectations of who the Messiah was going to be. The Messiah was going to be a King. The Messiah was going to be a political leader. The Messiah was going to be a warrior. And anything that didn’t fit their particular box of who they thought the Messiah was going to be, they critiqued and found fault in. To use “children” in this passage is to infer that the people of Jesus generation are immature, critiquing from afar, but not getting in the game. The people of Jesus’ generation had expectations of who Jesus was supposed to be, what Jesus was supposed to do and had already prescribed the plan for the Messiah. What this passage before ours reveals, and in addition what Simon’s critique of Jesus reveals, is our readiness to critique any new purpose God has for us. I know we like predictability. We like safety. We like to know what the plan is. I know I sure do. As Biblical Scholar Alan Culpepper puts it, “One reason for our repeated refusal to respond to the kingdom announcement may be that, like the people of Jesus’ generation, we have let our expectations for what God can do and is doing, and our restrictions on what passes for proper church life, prevent us from seeing how God is still at work in our own generation.” With this woman at Jesus’ feet, if we’re like Simon, we could miss the mighty work that God is doing in our midst because we let our expectations of Jesus blind us. I don’t have a specific example in mind, but I feel the Lord calling me to call to your attention, have you put God in a box at Providence? Have you let your expectations of Jesus and what Jesus is going to do in our midst prevent Jesus from moving in our midst? I invite you to confess how we have boxed-in Jesus at Providence. How we have said “Jesus, you’re doing this thing over here, but you’re supposed to be doing this other thing that I expected of you.” One of the beautiful things you’ll observe as you study the Book of Acts is how unpredictable the movement of God is. While that might scare you. While we might fear such powerful movements because of it’s unknown nature, it’s this very powerful movement that the Lord knows that we need. Please. Please. Let go of your expectations of Jesus in our midst and trust that He is moving in power among us. Proclaim it. Announce it to the world. Speak with boldness about the mighty power of our God.

If you didn’t catch all of what I just spoke about. If you dozed off or started day-dreaming. I have a very simple question for you, so pay attention. Which one are you in this passage? Are you Simon? Full of expectation of what the Messiah,

of what Jesus, is supposed to be. You've boxed Jesus in so much that you can't even see how Jesus is moving in our midst. You're so sure of yourself that you can't see your own faults. OR are you like the woman? You've experienced incredible forgiveness and freedom in Jesus. So much so that your love for Jesus and others is great. That you would gladly lay down your life for Jesus. Even if it meant social ridicule. Even it meant that you don't fit-in with the social elite. Oh...and by the way, Carson Wentz finally responded to the critiques this past week. What I heard was a man willing to admit his faults if need be and a desire to seek forgiveness if need be. I saw a spirit of humility. What actually transpired in that locker room, who knows. The call of our passage, the call of Jesus, is to fall more deeply in love with Him through confession, forgiveness and reconciliation. And the more we can confess, the more we will know the depths of Christ's love for us. And the more new life will abound in our midst. The more God will move powerfully and break the boundaries of boxes of expectations. So, are you Simon or the woman? Amen.