

Sunday, September 17, 2017
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Luke 7:36-50, NASB

Show Movie Clip – from “The War” -

https://youtu.be/UNG_ZjJsN9g

The bullies antagonize Stu, the young boy, who begins to fight back. His father, played by Kevin Costner, breaks up the fight but instead of yelling, chastising, or seeing the bullies punished for picking on his son, he buys them cotton candy. *“They look like they haven’t been given anything in a long time.”*

Grace. Amazing Grace. Getting what we don’t deserve.

According to the world, to society, this is unfair; but, God’s grace goes in opposition to that which society teaches. Grace or the unmerited love of God is offered without price. Grace is not about getting what you deserve it is about getting what you do not deserve. God’s love is not based on our abilities, how hard we have worked....God’s love is based on who God is...on His mercy...His decision to reach out to us through His Son, Jesus...

Throughout the Bible, in the Kingdom of God, there are dozens of examples of God’s “unfair love.” David, after committing adultery and murder, is forgiven and blessed...

The Prodigal Son after taking his inheritance, wasting it, and ruining His father's name is taken back with open arms and given the best robe and fatted calf...Zaccheus the tax collector after cheating the people, his own people, Jesus gives him the great honor of eating in his home and Zaccheus receives forgiveness...the woman caught in adultery, ready to be stoned, Jesus reaches down and lifts up out of the dirt, forgiving her sins...

This is what God did for the thief. In his last moments, dying on a cross, a life spent in crime, the thief cried out to Jesus, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."*

Michael Yaconelli, in his book, Messy Spirituality, writes, *"God's grace is unfair. How unfair! Shouldn't the thief have been asked to repent, to make amends, to at least declare he was sorry? No lectures, no sermons, no teaching or demands for repentance, Jesus just ushers the man into the kingdom of God. "*

The thief cries out and Jesus answers, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

Helmut Thielicke wrote, *"Jesus was able to do this only because he saw through the filth and crust of degeneration, because his eye caught the divine original which is hidden in every person...He saw in him an earring child of God...He saw in him a human being whom His Father loved and grieved over because he was going wrong...He*

saw him as God originally designed and meant him to be...Jesus did not identify the person with his sin, but rather saw in this sin something alien, something that really did not belong to him, something that merely chained and mastered him and from which he would free him and bring him back to his real self.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

And we have the woman with the alabaster jar...

Luke 7:36-38 - *36 Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. 37 And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, 38 and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume.*

A Pharisee by the name of Simon has invited Jesus in to a meal. The meal is interrupted by a woman who had heard that Jesus was at this Pharisee's home and came to see Him.

She is described as a "*sinner*"...we do not know what her sin is...some surmise she may have been a prostitute or an adulterer...

She comes into the house of these pious and holy religious leaders and stands at Jesus' feet. She begins to weep. She kneels and begins to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, drying His feet with her hair. She anoints His feet with expensive perfume that she has brought with her.

Like Jesus her reputation has preceded her and Simon, the Pharisee, mutters under his breath...

Luke 7:39 - *39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."*

For Simon, the righteousness of God means that God cannot endure sinners...you get what you deserve...For Simon, a follower of God gains salvation by upholding the law, by being pure, following the rules written down in the book of Leviticus...by separating oneself from the sinners of the world...For Simon, even Jesus must not be a prophet for a prophet, a righteous man, would not allow an unclean, sinful woman to touch him...

The Pharisee does not recognize his sin...recognize that he, just like the woman kneeling at Jesus' feet, was lost...

Joseph M. Stowell tells the story about a family trip to Chicago. He writes,

Each year we brought our family to spend time with Grandpa and Grandma and visit the museums. This year we decided to finish our Christmas shopping at suburban Woodfield Mall. In the midst of all the fun and excitement, one of us noticed that little three-and-a-half-year-old Matthew was gone. Terror immediately struck our hearts. We had heard the horror stories. We split up, each taking an assigned location. Mine was the parking lot. I'll never forget that night—kicking through the newly fallen snow, calling out his name at the top of my lungs. I felt like an fool, yet my concern for his safety outweighed all other feelings. Unsuccessful, I trudged back to our meeting point. My wife, Martie, had not found him, nor had my mother. And then my dad appeared, holding little Matthew by the hand. Our hearts leapt for joy. Interestingly enough, Matthew was untraumatized. He hadn't been crying. To him, there had been no problem. I asked my father where he had found him. "The candy counter," he replied. "You should have seen him.

His eyes came just about as high as the candy. He held his little hands behind his back and moved his head back and forth, surveying all the luscious options." Matthew didn't look lost. He didn't know he was lost. He was oblivious to the phenomenal danger he was in. This is a candy-counter culture, where people don't look lost and don't know they're lost live.

The woman with the alabaster jar does not live under any such illusion, nor did Paul after he met Christ on the road to Damascus. **Romans 7:24**, "*Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?*" The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul, **Romans 3:23**, "*...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*"

The first step to salvation is recognizing that we are lost. I remember teaching my boys this lesson when we were exiting the movies. We had gone to see *The Dark Knight*. In that film, the superhero Batman faces off against his arch-nemesis, The Joker. The Joker is a homicidal maniac who has killed many innocent people. In one scene the two fight and the Joker ends up hanging off a fire escape, barely holding on, about to fall to his death. Batman, a man with a strict moral code, reaches down and saves him, pulls him up, placing him in jail instead of allowing him to fall to his death.

Coming out of the theatre that night, I remember turning to my boys and telling them this is why I needed a Savior, why I needed Jesus, because I have no doubt I would have let him fall to his death...I would have probably pushed him. The ability to murder, to hate, to cast aside another life, is in me. I need a Savior.

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me...”

The woman with the alabaster jar, kneels before Jesus, and washes Jesus' feet. **Luke 7:39** - *“Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.’”*

Proving Himself to be a prophet, Jesus hears Simon's thoughts and quickly counters the Pharisee's misunderstanding of God's righteousness and offers Simon a lesson on grace...on the generous mercy of God...

Luke 7:40-42 - *40 And Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.” 41 “A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both.*

Jesus explains in His parable that a moneylender forgives the debt of two individuals...one who owed five hundred denarii and one who owed only fifty...and the moneylender forgives them simply because he wants to...not because of anything done by the debtors...

Grace...

Jesus also explains in His parable that love and gratitude are connected to grace, to forgiveness...

Luke 7:42-47 - *So which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." 44 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. 45 You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. 47 For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."*

Those who are forgiven little, love little...show little gratitude...but those who realize that they indeed are lost...who realize the depth of their sin...who realize how much they

have been forgiven...what a tremendous gift grace is...those who realize the depth of sin and the depth of God's love...respond by loving much...

This woman realizes the depth of her sin as she approaches Jesus and begins to weep...and she loves Jesus much, grateful for God's grace...she knows what is coming...what Jesus brings...

Luke 7:48-50 - *48 Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." 49 Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" 50 And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

She responds by washing His feet, drying them with her hair, and anointing his feet with expensive perfume...she has been loved much and so she responds with much love...

The woman responds very differently from the way Simon responds...Simon does not see himself as a sinner...does not see himself in need of grace or forgiveness...The Pharisee responds with little love...offering Jesus no hospitality...no water for His feet...no oil for anointing...

How are you responding to God's grace? Are you serving in the church the scriptures say Christ died for? Are you

reaching out to the stranger who visits our congregation remembering that when we do, as the scriptures say, we may be entertaining visiting angels? Are you looking for, seeking out, asking for ways you might serve Christ through His church, where you are needed? Are you giving of your finances sacrificially to the ministry and mission of the church? Are you reaching out to your neighbor, telling them about Jesus, inviting them to come and hear the message alongside you on Sunday morning? Are you reaching out to the less fortunate, working to help the hungry and the marginalized, remembering that the scriptures say that when we do this for one of them we are doing it for Christ Himself? Are you showing forgiveness to those who wrong you? Are you falling to your knees, crying out to God, washing His feet with your tears and love, humbled that God would love you, would sacrifice His Son for you? How are you responding to God's grace?

If we truly understood God's grace...like the woman with the alabaster jar of perfume...we would, as John Burke writes, *"we would live to serve, and love, and make Jesus known everywhere and with everything: serving people at work, serving our families, serving our neighbors, boldly inviting people into the Life Jesus offers..."*

If we are not doing these things it may be that we do not understand what Christ has done for us...we don't truly "get it"...how much we need a Savior...what Christ sacri-

ficed for us...for you and I...how much God loves us even though we do not deserve such love...

We may even be like Simon, the Pharisee, sitting back feeling like we are the righteous one...we don't really need a Savior...we are handling things well ourselves...Like Simon, we may be the ones who are quick to judge the others as less righteous than ourselves...slow to show Christ hospitality, opening our homes and hearts to Him...allowing Him to come in and take control...to take over...

Luke 7:47 - *For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."*

If we truly understood...

May we celebrate the gift...God's amazing grace...may we respond like the woman with the alabaster jar...like the individual in Jesus parable...may we love much in return for the love we have received...may we stand in awe that God comes up to us, regardless of what we've done, and gives us such a gift, a gift much sweeter than any cotton candy...