

## **WELCOME 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019 – 2 Lent '19 C**

Luke 7:36-50

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! We are so glad you are here doing what we were made to do...offer God all that we are among his people... Please stay with us through to morning tea & beyond...all sorts of good things...

We've all been there: You're having a pleasant meal or a nice glass of your favourite beverage when, out of nowhere, in the next mouthful suddenly you're choking, gagging & gasping for air! Something went down the wrong way!

It can be a painful - uncomfortable – shocking embarrassing experience. Today, in an unexpected encounter at the Table with Jesus, an outpouring of emotion & gratitude goes down the wrong way as the host of the meal chokes on what he considers too hard to swallow.

But Jesus understands what his host does not...unconditional love produces uninhibited gratitude...and Jesus promises that all who willingly receive his gift of grace & love will discover a place of forgiveness that will restore, renew, & release you to live fully & abundantly. For love gives birth to forgiveness & forgiveness makes love grow. And from great forgiveness, great love pours out.

It's like this...

Bring Jesus your worst. He can handle it.

Confess your ugliest. He'll forgive it.

At the table of his forgiveness, you find a life-transforming grace that will lead to nothing less than spontaneous, unguarded, unplanned, uninhibited, joyful worship.

Jesus comes for those who are in need...

Unless you can admit your deep down/profound need Jesus has nothing to offer you

When you acknowledge that need, Jesus has everything you need.

We'll explore & experience that together today...

Let's pray...

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

*Forgiving God,*

*Too often we take your forgiveness for granted. Too often we cling to our sin, believing that it is our right to harbor resentments and bitterness. Be merciful to us, and show us the depth of healing that is offered when you forgive, for the sake of the one who recognized total surrender to forgiveness and offered it willingly, Jesus Christ our saving Lord. Amen.*

## 2 LENT '19 C – AT THE TABLE: A PLACE OF FORGIVENESS

### FAITH CHAT:

1. If you could have any living person over for dinner, who would you pick? Why?
2. Share a time in your life when you were incredibly thankful & relieved.
3. What difference does forgiveness make in your daily life?

Who has a welcome mat at their door? We have one...doesn't say, "welcome" on it...doesn't say *THAT* either & the more I think about it, it's there for people to wipe their feet rather than to extend a welcome. Doesn't mean you aren't welcome to drop in...just I don't know if the thing you step on wipe your feet on neighbour's cat sleeps on is the best way to welcome you to our house...Which begs the question...

Do we really welcome everyone to our homes? Do you? Well, not really.

The word "Welcome" = a "greeting given due to joy upon someone's arrival." If that is the case, there are some people I do *NOT* welcome. I do *NOT* welcome Jehovah's Witnesses. I do *NOT* welcome people trying to sell things. I do *NOT* welcome folks who tell me they are raising \$\$ for some worthy cause...I know better. I welcome family & friends. I welcome you. So my welcome sometimes has strings/conditions attached. Maybe that's you too...And that's certainly Simon the Pharisee. Isn't it great when you show up in worship & the pastor says 'you're just like a Pharisee'?

But seriously...Simon asked Jesus to have dinner with him. Pretty straightforward... Jesus is the hottest trending hashtag in town. It's a social coup for Simon to have Jesus at his table & you know he's got his Pharisaic besties all lined up around the best food & choice wine & the servants are on their best behavior & like a good socially aware host of his day he's left the front door open so his neighbours & the usual hangers on could slip in, sit against the wall, be quiet & listen to the wisdom about to bust loose from Jesus, Simon & the other invited guests & ooh & ahhh at Simon's fabulous party...& wish they were on the guest list not just having a sticky beak

However, since he left the door open; this woman wanders in...not *wanders* but "barges" in. She doesn't just come into the gathering. She interrupts it with an outrageous audacity that can only cause the diners & onlookers to gasp in shock & horror. Throughout much of the meal she is behind Jesus as he lays on a large cushion & eats from the common plates of food...weeping. (common dining method for large gatherings...food on the floor or a low table guests reclining – laying on pillows & eating with their feet out behind them) Doesn't appear to be racking sobs, but enough for her tears to wet Jesus' feet. How long...? Then she unfastens her hair & lets it fall free & wipes his feet with her hair. Check this...Not only has she invaded the men's dining space, she lets her hair down for all to see & drapes herself all over Jesus. To be out in public with her hair down was a shameful thing, yet she acts as if she & Jesus are the only people in the room...& neither one cares Next, she kisses his feet & finally, bathes them w/ perfumed oil & continues with the weeping wiping & kissing. The very intimacy of her attentions gobsmacks the whole room & add to that her reputation in the community & this is scandalous...at least that's how Simon the Pharisee host sees it.

An aside that is essential with this account: Why the NLT calls her "a certain immoral woman from that city" I have no idea. The Gk text simply says she's a "sinner" – *hamartolos* – "one who misses the mark"...most every other English translation says "sinner" – *immoral* is an interpretation not a translation. She is most likely *NOT* a prostitute. There were words Lk could have used to highlight sexual sin. He didn't. Why does this matter? We need to remember human sinfulness is bigger than how we sinners corrupt issues of sex...how broken human intimacy is in a sinful world. Jesus calls out greed/\$\$ sin more often than anything else...so let's not get hung up in the bedroom & let's certainly remember women are capable of a far wider cornucopia of sinfulness than sexual sinfulness...that's true about all of us but when we read the NT let's don't make all the ladies "ladies of the evening"...ok?

What we do know is that whatever she is guilty of having done...the whole town knows...and she knows they know...and she is among them in spite of it. But Why? Why would she make an obvious spectacle of herself...knowing that she wears her "sinner's" badge just as surely as the Pharisees wore their special robes? Hold that thought...there's another question I want to get to first...It's the one Simon asks...

"If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" Uhhh...John that doesn't look like a question...Ok how 'bout like this: "That shameless thing is all over him. Is he a prophet or not? Sure doesn't act like one."

Simon's shot a month's pay fêting the hotshot young rabbi from Galilee & he seems to think nothing of this known sinner's tears caresses kisses & perfume...That's not how prophets act! Like this is completely normal understandable behaviour. Funny thing about Simon's question...you'll have to look at it in context...

When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" See it? "he said to himself." He doesn't verbalize his disgust...and as a decent host he's got his poker face on...not even a flicker of a sneer crosses his eyes/lips; but in his heart... Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." Turns out, Jesus is a prophet. He not only knows what kind of woman this is but what kind of man Simon is & even what Simon is thinking. So Jesus tells a little parable about a creditor forgiving the debts of two borrowers & asks Simon who he thinks will be more grateful, the guy forgiven fifty denarii or five hundred? Simon knows his math & figures anyone forgiven 10x more debt than someone else is going to be at least 10x more grateful...will love the loaner 10x as much...duh!

But now it gets personal...because Jesus, in front of the whole gathering compares this woman's extravagance with Simon's neglect. The parable alone would have been sufficient. "Simon...she's been forgiven a lot...you know how much she needed forgiving & her slate's clean so she's pretty choked up about that." But Jesus compares her extravagant act of love prompted by gratitude...her uninhibited devotion to Jesus borne out of thanksgiving with Simon's miserly sense of entitlement. Her tears over against Simon's internal sneers...

What Jesus wants Simon, his disciples, the roomful of slack-jaws & you & me to see is really this: Jesus promises: "I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full." And that fullness that abundance begins with 4 powerful words "Your sins are forgiven." Life in Christ... new life... abundant & eternal life start right there...in the forgiveness that only Jesus brings by his life death & resurrection...new life... abundant & eternal life start right there...in the forgiveness that only Jesus can offer in restoring us to our proper place as sons & daughter of the Father.

This woman apparently has been forgiven much, maybe 10x what others have been forgiven. That explains the tears the hair the kisses & the perfume. She is overcome by gratitude, the kind of gratitude understood only by someone who has been given everything...ev-ry-thing. Whoa...John...Is forgiveness really that important/powerful? Yeah...think about it like this...forgiveness at its heart is how a relationship is restored. Forgiveness sets someone free from any claim I might have on them for a past injury insult or infraction. Forgiveness cancels that relational indebtedness & opens up the future by releasing the past...It cuts that anchor chain & set us loose into the future

But it's more...Forgiveness gives you back yourself. You see, after a while, being indebted, owing others, knowing yourself first & foremost as a sinner -- these realities come to dominate and define you. We tend to think of ourselves the way others think of us. You've heard me say 1000 times that parents can destroy a child with the way they talk about their child. My messy child my disorganized child my rebellious child...A husband/wife can completely ruin their spouse by their evaluation of that other person. If you are told often enough that you are no more & no less than what you've done, the mistakes you've made, the debt you owe...eventually you believe it. But when you are forgiven, all those limitations disappear & you are restored, renewed, set free. Which is precisely...I'll let him say it...

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, & that the time of the Lord's favour has come."*

That, I believe this woman had experienced in Jesus before this dinner party...but in this moment she responds with unbridled joy & devotion & extreme thanksgiving & gratitude, unable to hold back, unaware or uncaring of the surprise & stares & disapproval of everyone else.. So Jesus repeats the news that maybe felt too good to be true..."Your sins are forgiven." Jesus wants those words that assurance to be planted deep into her heart...& into yours. Unconditional love produces uninhibited gratitude. Love gives birth to forgiveness & forgiveness makes love grow. And from great forgiveness, great love pours out. Earlier I asked Why? Why would she make an obvious spectacle of herself...knowing that she wears her "sinner's" badge just as surely as the Pharisees wore their special robes? Because now she wears a different robe...the robe of forgiveness & righteousness freely given by Jesus Christ & once you're dressed for the party...there's no holding back.

But we've left Simon mouth-agape at the head of the table. Jesus has made his point & offers no stern rebuke/existential warning to Simon...No Get your act together boy! Simply the observation that those who receive little forgiveness love little. Maybe they simply don't think they need it as much...or see forgiveness as something ok for thee but not for me? Pastor/Theologian Karl Barth said..."We don't appreciate the fact that God does not owe us anything & that we are bound to live from God's goodness alone. We are left with nothing but the great humility & thankfulness of a child presented with many gifts." Or you are left like Simon...pretty sure he is righteous. Obeys the law. Does what he should. So not only does he not need forgiveness but its very mention is threatening, offensive...and that offense will ultimately get Jesus killed... and that death means sin is forgiven once & for all & forever. Irony in that! The execution that was supposed to stamp out this flagrant forgiving business...is culminated by...*Father forgive...once for all forever.*

Jesus promises that all who willingly receive his gift of grace & love will discover a place of forgiveness that will restore, renew, & release you to live fully & abundantly. Bring Jesus your worst. He can handle it. Confess your ugliest. He'll forgive it. At the table of his forgiveness, you find a life-transforming grace that will lead to nothing less than spontaneous, unguarded, unplanned, uninhibited, joyful worship & life in him more wonderful than anything you ever imagined...Jesus comes for those who are in need...Unless you can admit your deep down/profound need Jesus has nothing to offer you. When you acknowledge that need, Jesus has everything you need.

Let's pray with that in mind...***Lord Jesus, you have declared our freedom through your death and resurrection. We can offer nothing in return but thanksgiving and our hearts turned to receive your Spirit. Make our lives a living gospel, an unceasing proclamation of your love and our praise to you. Let your mighty love so fall on us that we have no choice but to tell the world what we have received freely in you from the Father's grace. We pray in your Name. Amen.***