

A SINNER AT HIS FEET
LUKE 7: 36-8:3;
JEANIE STANLEY
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Luke 7: 36-8:3

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. 37 And 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. 38 She 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. 39 Now 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." 40 Jesus 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. 42 When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore, 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." 48 Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." 8 Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2 as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

1 Kings 21: 1-14

21:1 Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. 2 And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." 3 But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance." 4 Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat. 5 His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?" 6 He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" 7 His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." 8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. 9 She wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; 10 seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone

him to death.” 11 The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, 12 they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. 13 The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. 14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”

SERMON

Scriptures tell stories that are bigger than life. They teach us lessons we need to learn. This is certainly true of our scripture readings this morning.

When I preached on our gospel text at the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary earlier this week, I admitted that sometimes I feel like Simon, the Pharisee. Like Simon, I make assumptions about what God is doing in the world and how our church should operate. I talked about the ways God surprises me by loving people and loving me with amazing grace – sometimes through me but sometimes in spite of me. Like Simon, I do not always recognize God at work in my midst, and at times I am quicker to judge others than to love others.

I am not willing to say I identify with Jezebel or Ahab, but I admit that I have sinned in my sense of entitlement. I often act as if I deserve the blessings of my life. I have not personally taken property that belongs to someone else, but I buy products and use resources provided by companies that have done so. I could do better.

Like Ahab, I do not give enough respect to the Naboths of the world. We have seen people like Naboth in the news lately – people who have worked hard for generations in the fishing industry or in small businesses on the coast – people whose livelihood has been devastated possibly because a large corporation felt entitled to greater profits. A woman who owns a hot dog stand in Alabama or a man who runs a fishing supply business in Louisiana are not significant in comparison to huge corporations like BP. Like Naboth, some people believe they are expendable.

We saw the sins of Ahab in those who sold mortgages to people who could not afford them. We saw the sins of Ahab in those who bundled questionable loans and called them good investments. Years ago we witnessed the sins of Ahab in the Enron executives who hid their fraud behind fancy words and questionable accounting. There are plenty of Naboths who suffer because people feel entitled and care little about the poor widow, the hard-working fisherman or employees who lose their retirement fund.

The sins of the world are great, but if we focus on sinfulness, our own sinfulness or the sinfulness of others, we miss the point of our gospel passage. The Good News is not that we sin or that other people sin. The Good News is not that we judge others as Simon judged the sinful woman. The Good News is about grace, not sin.

The Good News is that God offers us grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The Good News is that we are incredibly blessed when we recognize we need God’s grace. We are blessed when we give thanks for God’s grace. We are blessed when we join Jesus in offering God’s grace to others.

The woman in the story was blessed because she recognized her own sinfulness. She received forgiveness and came in gratitude to thank her Savior. She took a risk to kneel at the feet of Jesus. She

risked shame and ridicule. The woman took a risk and made a sacrifice to offer what she had to Christ in thanksgiving.

Although the scriptures do not identify her sin, the woman probably was guilty of moral impropriety, possibly prostitution or adultery. A respected woman in the community would not approach a stranger, particularly a Rabbi. It was highly improper for a woman to let down her hair in public. The intimacy of kissing Christ's feet would have been shocking, but Jesus looked deeper. He understood her heart.

According to John Calvin ([Calvin's Commentaries](#), XVI, 140), Jesus told the woman her sins were forgiven as a *confirmation* of her faith. She had already tasted God's grace before Jesus said a word, but God continued to seal mercy on her heart and bring her peace. The scriptures do not tell us about the circumstances of her repentance. Instead, Jesus focused on the joy that comes to people of faith who are grateful for the grace they receive. If we are faithful, we offer our gifts out of thankfulness for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. When we do, God continues to seal mercy on our hearts and bring us peace.

Today we will commission those who have volunteered to help with the Summer Bible Adventure, the Community of Hope, and the Community Restore Project. Whatever we are called to do for Christ, my prayer is that each of us offers our gifts like the woman in our gospel lesson. I pray that we offer ourselves as living sacrifices with thanksgiving to God. Jesus will know what is in our hearts.

There will be times when we behave more like Simon than Jesus. We will not always offer hospitality to Christ or to anyone else. There will be times when we judge people who behave in a way we consider inappropriate.

During Summer Bible Adventure children will make noise when they are told to be quiet. Volunteers for Summer Bible Adventure and the Community Restore Project will arrive late or not show up at all. Someone Pat visits in the hospital will be rude or unappreciative.

When we feel judgment taking over, I hope we remember our own need of forgiveness and grace. If we do, God will seal our hearts with mercy once again and bring us peace.

I hope we expect Christ to surprise us. I hope we recognize Christ loving people right in front of us in ways we never imagined.

This happened to me during the Community Restore Project last year. One of the sites needed electrical work, but this was not part of our project. Thanks be to God someone donated the assistance of electricians.

When I arrived to help serve lunch, I went around inviting people to come eat. One man declined saying that he had come to the site as a job assignment. He was not one of the volunteers, but he was curious about the project. He wanted to know why all these people were donating their efforts. "Why are they doing this?" he asked.

I explained that this was a mission project for the churches involved. I told him people were giving thanks to God for the blessings of their lives by blessing others. "Believe it or not, people enjoy it," I said. I pointed out Leonard Kropp, who came from a cardiac rehab appointment to work that morning. I talked about one of our youth, Abbey Oehler. Abby worked for Community Restore during the day and

then headed over to the church to help with Summer Bible Adventure. The man could hear people laughing as they worked in the heat and the dust.

The man said he wanted to do something like this. His mother's home was destroyed by a tornado the previous year. People provided her with another place to live. He wanted to give back. I could sense the Lord at work in this man's life. Later I learned that he returned to worship in his congregation after being away for a long time. Who knows, he may be one of the volunteers this year. Leonard and Abby will be there.

Miracles happen when we do the work of the Lord. I do not know who is more blessed – those who serve or those who are being served. I know the children will have fun at Summer Bible Adventure, but I remember seeing leaders having fun last year, too. Abby and Kylee had a great water fight with the kids in the parking lot. Children of God, whatever their age, have fun when they come together in Christ's name.

Pat Rehm will be blessed to offer care. She already knows this from her experience as a shepherd. How is it that a patient lifts us up when we are supposed to be the one providing care? It happens all the time.

Jesus will surprise Pat. She may find herself encouraging a staff person instead of the patient she thought she was visiting. When you have time, Pat, I hope you take a moment to pray in the chapel before you begin your rounds.

We all would do well to pray before we serve God. In fact, we might imagine ourselves kneeling at the feet of Jesus as we begin each day. We will commission people who have volunteered for particular projects this morning, but all of us are commissioned by Christ: *Go and make disciples, Jesus told us, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you...*

Next week we will use the beautiful kneeling bench that Edwin Gerrick created for our service of ordination. We hope to make the bench available anytime for those who want to pray on their knees. There is something about kneeling before Christ that helps us understand how great God is and how blessed we are to depend on God's grace. Please join me in prayer.

Loving Savior, we kneel before you with thanksgiving and love. We give thanks for your forgiveness of our sins and for your call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Strengthen us by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we serve Christ faithfully. Seal your mercy on our hearts once more and bring us peace.

Gracious God, we give thanks for Edwin Gerrick's faithfulness in creating this kneeling bench to God's glory. We ask your blessing on all who kneel here. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.