

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Amen.

Today, we have very interesting bible stories. Well, I mentioned to you the other day about my favorite bible verses found in the whole chapters of Romans 8, and here is another one that I really like for many reasons. It is a story about the silent woman who anoints Jesus' feet with her tears, dries those same tears from his feet with her hair, kisses his feet, and anoints them with the ointment she herself brings. It is similar to stories found in Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8. But it is a very different story with very different emphases. Our gospel text story in Luke comes quite early in Jesus' ministry, unlike the event in the three other gospels that came late and are connected with Jesus' death.

It's such an interesting story where you find many themes about forgiveness, judgment, expectation, who is in and who is out, big sinners, little sinners, about who is this Jesus and who is God, about I know everything about God, about our faith... and so on.

As usual, I will focus only on two issues for us to wrestle with this morning. But to begin with, every Sunday, we are given a text to dwell on and the last two Sundays, we had the gospel of Luke 7:1-10 and Luke 7:11-17 and today we jump to Luke 7:36 to the end 50 and continues on to Luke 8:1-3. Why did we jump to verse 36? What are we missing from Luke 7:18-36? Yes, we are missing a lot. (Find out yourself!) Then we continue to Luke 8 verse 1 to 3 for what reason? What is the connection between the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and those many women who followed Jesus and even provided for Jesus' party, bankrolled Jesus' ministry except to emphasize that during Jesus' time, women were equally called and loved by God as well as men...

Having said that, let's dig in to our gospel text. Let's start by setting the scene: We are at a dinner party thrown by a Pharisee, whose guests are likely as prominent in the community as he is. And at the center of this meal is Jesus, the well-known by now, young prophet about whom everyone is talking. Expectations, no doubt, are high. It is kind of a great gathering of the respected and respectable people to discuss important matters.

Then, here comes this woman who dares to interrupt the party. She is also well known by the people sitting around the table as a sinner. Frankly, we don't know the precise nature of her sin. Well, remember Peter who said to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish, *"Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"* (Luke 5:8).

So we cannot speculate about what kind of sinner she is, like we can't speculate about Peter when he said "I am sinful man". But let us assume that whatever she has done, many people and others – including this Pharisee – know about it.

Then what happened next! We know it, we heard from the reading, without going in to the details again, let me say that she must have heard about Jesus and there she was weeping, and

proceeds to clean his feet, washing them with her tears, drying them with her hair, finally applying ointment she has brought.

The first point I want us to remember about this gospel text today is this unnamed woman's boldness and her strong audacity and what Jesus told her at the end, "YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU: GO IN PEACE" Luke 7:50.

I admire her decision to go to the house. I like her determination to enter where she was not wanted or welcome. Her desire to be like the other women who followed Jesus, were all acts of faith. And this is the point for us Trinity members; Faith is to believe that you are worthy of salvation. You are worthy to sit at the table. You are worthy of touching, and being touched by, God. You are worthy of belonging. You are worthy of being called a disciple, regardless of who you are and where you are. We claim the Faith and to believe in God and what God has done to save us through Jesus Christ. We hang on to that faith and we dare to act on it like this woman did. Yes, faith is a gift from God, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. But our response is to claim it and remind ourselves every day that we are God's family.

We are like this woman who says "NO" to those who would keep her at bay; "no" to those who pull away when she enters the room; "no" to those who tried to look her down when she dares to express her love.

We are like this woman who says "YES" to Jesus because she believes Jesus sees her, too. Jesus favors her and Jesus regards her. Because to be seen, to be favored, to be regarded by Jesus is what we need to remember today from this text. You and I can say, that "I belong at this table, too. I have every right to show my love for Jesus. And I am also worthy to join my brothers and sisters in Christ in this church and in this world.

Trinity members, the second point I want us to remember today is about Jesus' words "Your sins are forgiven" Luke 7:48. The theme of this sermon as you can see on the front page of the bulletin is about forgiveness, about being forgiven and to forgive. We know the three most popular phrases in America. Right? (I love you...I forgive you. and dinner is ready).

During my continuing education, I came across a study about people's attitudes toward forgiveness in America. The study was funded by the Templeton Foundation and co-sponsored by the University of Michigan and the National Institute for Mental health. It was interesting to know from the findings that 75% of Americans are "very confident" that they have been forgiven by God for their past offenses. The lead researcher, Dr. Loren Toussaint, expressed great surprise at such high confidence, especially since many of these same people are not regular church attenders.

But one interesting thing emerged from that study as well is that only about half of the people surveyed claimed that they were certain that they had forgiven others. The other half admitted that whereas God may be a galaxy-class forgiver, we the ordinary folks struggle to forgive

others. It's difficult to forgive other people with whom you are angry. It's even difficult to forgive yourself sometimes.

And the last point is even very interesting. But where forgiveness does take place, the study found a link between forgiveness and better health. The more prone a person is to grant forgiveness, the less likely he or she will suffer from any stress-related illnesses. Indeed, forgiveness is important. Forgiveness is necessary and finally Forgiveness is healthy.

Forgiveness is where we live. Jesus taught us "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*" in the Lord's Prayer. We are forgiven sinners. Let us forgive others. Amen.