

Luke 7:36-50 *When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. ³⁹When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. ⁴¹"Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. ⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

This past week we celebrated another birthday for our nation. All over our land it sounded like a war zone as the fireworks went off and we celebrated the freedom and liberty that we enjoy as citizens of the USA. It's good for us to have a reminder on a regular basis of what a wonderful blessing it is to live in this country. We don't have an oppressive government which gives us no freedom to do anything. You may not have a positive view of what we have or like everything that is going on, but what we have is so much better than what other countries endure around the world. We don't have a government which dictates to us where we are to live or what we are to drive. We don't have a tyrant who tells us what religion we have to follow or forbids us from worshipping God at all. We don't have a government which arbitrarily prescribes what profession we will undertake or forces us into military service. You may not like a lot of what is happening right now, but we have many freedoms that we enjoy as citizens of America. We are free to decide what we want to do with our lives, what we want to drive, where we want to live, how we are going to worship and how we want to live our lives. Ask our ancestors who lived under the oppression of English rule in the late 1700's, we are free from the burden of oppression. This has been part of the fabric of our society from the very beginning.

As we gather today, we have the opportunity today to celebrate the freedom which we enjoy as citizens of God's kingdom from the burden and oppression of sin. While we enjoy this freedom and rejoice in this freedom, we also have the reminder today that this freedom comes with a call to action. The freedom God has given to us in Jesus from the burden and oppression of our sin looks for a response in the lives which we live as the people of God. Because of this, we want to look at the text before us today under this thought: **You are Free! Now What?**

I'm reading through a book currently entitled, **Simple Church**, by Tom Rainer and Eric Geiger. In chapter two, I came across an interesting statement. They were talking about the TV show from about 10 years ago entitled, "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." Do you remember that show? If you do, you remember that with each home which they remodeled, the team leader Ty would design a special room for someone in the family. It was always the last room which they revealed to the family. In talking about this room, Tom Rainer wrote, "It is an act of grace. Watching the reaction of the recipient of this grace is stirring. Grace always is." When someone is shown grace...there is a reaction. Grace is undeserved love. It's a special labor of love done for someone not because you have to but simply because you want to. It's something done for another person simply because you know it will bring joy and gladness to that person, regardless of how much trouble you had to go through yourself. The responses were usually big smiles, wide eyes, huge hugs, endless thank you's. There is always a response when grace is shown. That response is always stirring.

This is exactly what we see in the lady of this account. She had been shown grace. She's described as someone who "lived a sinful life." Literally, she was someone who lived a life devoted to sin. What a description! How would you like to carry that description about you? Many over the years have speculated that she had been a prostitute. That's possible but not specifically said here. She could have been engaged in other sin. We don't know. Whatever it was, she had a bad reputation with the people of her town. She probably wouldn't have been someone too many of us would have associated with. But somewhere along the way, she had come to know Jesus as her Savior. She must have heard him speak somewhere and was greatly affected by his words. She had learned to know of her sin and believe in Jesus and in the forgiveness that came through him. Now she knew freedom! She had come to know grace—God's undeserved love and kindness—through first hand experience. The guilt and weight of her sin had oppressed her. She was trapped in a dungeon which she could not get out of. While she had enjoyed her sinful lifestyle at the time, reveled in it and even been devoted to it, she had come to see it as completely wrong before God. Now the guilt and shame of what she had done and how she had lived crushed her. The embarrassment humiliated her. And then she heard Jesus. He forgave her. He released her from the guilt of her sin. He lifted the weight off of her shoulders by promising that he would die for that sin. The debt which she owed for her sin to the Almighty God had been forgiven. She was free from the curse and guilt of her sin. She was free to live as God's child. She was free to worship and praise her God. This is what we see in the text. Tears of guilt and shame were flowing in a repentant flood from her heart as she lay at Jesus' feet. She used her tears to wash Jesus' feet and she wiped them off with her hair. She kissed them and poured perfume on them to anoint them. All of these were signs of her gratitude and thanks for what Jesus had done for her. All of these were reactions to the grace God had shown her. Her freedom from sin caused to respond in thanksgiving in recognizing the huge burden which had been lifted from her.

We see a much different reaction to Jesus from the Pharisee, Simon, who had invited Jesus to his house for dinner. His reaction rather than expressing thanks for salvation was almost one of disdain. He didn't even care enough to observe the common courtesies which the custom of the day required for a host to show to his guests. He most likely invited Jesus over not as a friendly gesture but as a way for him to find just one more thing to hold against Jesus. His response betrayed how little he felt he needed the

salvation which Jesus offered. Simon like the other Pharisees was steeped in self-righteousness and an inherent unwillingness to acknowledge his sin. He felt no need for salvation nor for a Savior. He was probably outwardly a very moral person. The Pharisees didn't just talk about living this way, they actually lived it. He was held in high esteem in the eyes of the people because of the way he lived. The problem is that he saw no need for a Savior. Because he had no need for a Savior, he had no need to serve Jesus nor respond to him. The unsocial reception which he gave to Jesus spoke volumes that he felt no deep affection for Jesus. When he in his arrogant pride scoffed about Jesus allowing this woman to touch him, Jesus pointed out his error in a very blunt way with the parable. The sad part is that this man who thought he had no debt to forgive, would drown eternally in his debt.

We are forced to ask ourselves, "Are we more like the Pharisee or the lady?" We want to say, "Neither." We don't want to be labeled a "sinner" or "one who lived a sinful life" like this lady was. We also don't want to say that we are arrogant in our selfish pride like this Pharisee who looked down on her and say we have no need for a Savior. The truth is we are both. The truth is that we are sinners before God...whether we like the label or not. That sinful nature which resides in each one of us is fully devoted to sin. And for that sin, we stand before God owing a huge debt. The 500 hundred denarii in the text helps us see the depths of this debt. A denarius was about one day's work. Five hundred would be a debt of almost two year's wages. That's an oppressive debt. Yet, like the Pharisee we often walk around as if our debt were only 50 denarii...and our actions show it. Here's the biting, crushing part of this text from Jesus: does our lack of activity in service to God display how little we think we need a Savior? Are we overflowing in our efforts to serve Jesus and express our gratitude to him for the deep debt which he has forgiven? Do we even think about this? What does this say about our spiritual lives and the way we view the debt which he has forgiven? We try to be outwardly moral. We really seek to do good things—to help people and be nice to them. We seek to live good lives and help our neighbors as much as we can. The vast majority of us have never done anything to get us thrown in jail. We want to maintain a good reputation among others. We would never want the label "devoted to sin" attached to us. Sure we come each week and confess our sins, but they aren't really that big of a deal. We did our best and feel God will be happy with us. We don't stop to fully recognize just how big of a hole we have dug for ourselves before God because of our sin. We falsely convince ourselves we are above that...better than that...much like this Pharisee.

You are probably familiar with the line in the movie, "A Few Good Men" where Jack Nicholson shouted at Tom Cruise, "You can't handle the truth!" That's more true than we know. We can't handle the truth about our sin. We don't want to look into the spiritual mirror of God's law and see our nature as God sees it: ugly, corrupted, distorted, devoted to sin. It hurts to admit that we are no better than this lady in our text and deserve God's eternal wrath and punishment for the sinful pride that arrogantly places us above others. God, have mercy on us. We are sinners. We are trapped in the dungeon of sin, handcuffed by our grief and weighed down by our shame.

But Jesus has freed us from this prison. You are free from the guilt and shame of your sin because of what Jesus has done for you. He forgives you...that is, he releases you from the punishment you ought to pay for your sins because of what he did on Calvary's cross. This is grace! God hasn't just released from a spiritual debt of 50 denarii. He has released you from a debt of 500 denarii. Though we deserve hell, God has given us the certainty of heaven. Can you stop for just a moment today and really fathom the depths of love God has shown you in Jesus? Just take a moment to ponder the burden of spiritual debt which God has canceled for you. Not because you earned it or deserved it. Simply because he loves you. This is grace. God's grace is yours! You are free!

So now what? You are free from the debt of your sin. God has given you grace. Now what? What's your response? How will you show your gratitude to Jesus? You are the recipient of his grace. Grace is always stirring. A living faith will always demonstrate itself by love for the Savior. This woman chose to show her love for Jesus in a unique and unusual way. And Jesus didn't turn her away. He accepted the praise and worship which she brought. Being freed from her debt gave her a fervent desire to show gratitude. Everyone who has experienced the forgiveness of sins will find ways to show love in Jesus. This is called discipleship. This concept of discipleship has been on my heart lately. We are not here just to make members of Northdale Lutheran, but disciples for Jesus. That is more than just coming to worship once in a while. A disciple is one who follows Jesus. That means not just one who believes in him, but one who strives to live like him. Anyone who follows Jesus seeks to grow in faith through Bible Study and then express that faith in action by praying, giving offerings, serving others, witnessing to them about Jesus, encouraging them, supporting them. Notice the action. A disciple isn't just someone who comes to church once in a while—that's a member. Our mission as God's church is to make disciples. The process is simple. Connect with God as you come to know his grace. Grow in that grace as you learn more of his love. Then respond to that grace as you serve others and proclaim his word to the world.

This gives us chance to evaluate our lives. Am I showing my gratitude for God's grace by growing as his disciple or am I just going through the motions on the outside and not really being stirred on the inside? Does my activity show that I am growing as a disciple and trying to connect with others to serve them and share God's word with them or does it show that I am pretty confident in my own abilities and have little need for a Savior? From the amount of time I spend studying God's word and growing in my faith to the amount I spend serving others and seeking to share God's Word to the offerings that I give and the prayers which I offer on behalf of others, am I giving testimony to the fact that I am a recipient of God's huge and amazing grace or am I acting like the Pharisee and actually showing disdain for God and his grace? This text forces us to ask these evaluating questions. I can't answer them for you. But you can. Where you find sin and disdain for God and arrogance and pride, confess that before your Lord. Know that these are the very sins for which Jesus willingly went forward to Calvary's cross. With tears flowing from repentance, lay those sins before Jesus and revel in his grace! You are free from those sins. You are free from the punishment owed so that you can go out and serve him in praise and glory.

The study of God's word always calls us first to repentance and then to action. Our mission as God's people is to make disciples who are growing in their faith "*so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*" This is a continual process for us as God's people. It is a continual process that each one of us are committed to. As you connect to God through his grace and worship him for his goodness, respond to his goodness by progressing in this process of discipleship. As you grow in your faith, grow in your connection and service to one another. As you grow in your service to one another, expand that service to bringing the love of Christ to the world around you. God's grace calls you to respond in love to him. His grace always stirs us. You are free in Jesus from the guilt and shame of your sin. Now what?

