

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Curate

Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Never Perfect, But Perfectly Forgiven!

It was a little over a month ago that together, as a congregation, we honored our mothers. Well, today is Father's Day – and Dad deserves his place of honor as well. Fathers come in different sizes and shapes, different personalities and temperaments. For many of us, there are fond memories – and for some there is pain. Fathers are never perfect – or else they would be mothers – right ladies? Well, from the perspective of a son and father, myself – I would like to offer you this child's view of a father"

4 -6 years: "My Daddy can do anything!"

7 - 11 years: "My Dad knows a lot... a whole lot."

12-13 years: "My father does not know quite everything."

14–21 years: "Oh Dad? He's old-fashioned - hopelessly out of date!"

25 years: "I guess he knows a little bit about it."

35 years: "Honey, before we decide, let's get Dad's idea first."

50 years: "I wonder what Dad would have thought about that."

60 years: "My Dad knew literally everything!"

65 years: "I wish I could talk it over with Dad just once more."

I don't know where you might be on this timeline – but for me, I thank God for my Dad – John, and my Father in Law – Eric, and the blessing that they have been in my life.

Father's, Dad's, Grandpa's and Father's to be – may God Bless you all – and in His infinite mercy, give to you the grace, wisdom, counsel and love – that only our Heavenly Father can give. Thanks Dads! By the way – according to statistics – Mother's Day is the day with the largest number of telephone calls placed on record – and Father's Day is the largest number of collect calls on record. Need I say more?

Like many families today who will take Dad out to eat – Scripture tells us that one day Jesus was invited out for dinner. A Pharisee named Simon asked if Jesus would like to eat at his house, and Jesus accepted. Now, it seems that news got out that Jesus would be eating at Simon's, and a sinful woman waited for Jesus to show up there.

There are similar stories in the other Gospels describing when Mary Magdalene anointed Jesus with oil. While those stories are similar, they contain several notable differences as well, enough to say that it's not fair to assume that this sinful woman is Mary Magdalene. The text says "a certain woman," apparently not wanting to name her, so we will leave it at that as well.

At Simon's house this woman's tears fell on Jesus' feet, and she wiped them off with her own hair, kissed them and poured expensive perfume on them. This may seem very odd today but back in the first century, everyone wore sandals and cleaning someone else's feet was a sign of respect and honor – as well as a sign of servitude. It was customary for a person who was well to do to have their servant clean a guests feet upon entering. I might add that it was also customary to eat reclining on large pillows, often with an elbow on a table of sorts, with your legs either to the side or behind you. That's how the woman's tears were able to cascade onto Jesus' feet.

It would seem that Simon did not like the fact that this woman was washing Jesus' feet with her tears, and anointing Him with perfume. In fact, he used it as proof that Jesus was not who people said He was: a prophet. 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.*" (Luke 7:39)

Instead, Jesus was actually proving that **He was who He said He was**, and responded to Simon's unspoken thoughts. Jesus told him a story of 2 people who owed their creditor some money. One owed a

small amount, and the other owed 10 times as much. The creditor, knowing that neither could pay, cancelled and forgave both of their debts. Jesus asked who would be more thankful for it. Simon said that the one who owed more and was forgiven of more would love more. Jesus made His point and then masterfully connected it to Simon and the sinful woman - saying that the woman showed Jesus much more love and gratitude. He declared forgiveness, saying to her, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" (Luke 7:48) and He sent her off, much to the disappointment of the other guests, who were most likely Pharisees, just like Simon, who were pretty annoyed at the whole thing – who said "*Who is this who even forgives sins?*" (Luke 7:49)

Let's look more closely at the 2 people in this Gospel story besides Jesus. First, there was Simon the Pharisee. He had invited Jesus to his home but had not performed the customary foot washing of an honored guest. Even though Simon was the host, he really hadn't treated his guest with much courtesy. And I just can't help but wonder - why?

Maybe he was just trying to find an excuse to dismiss Jesus and all of the things that He had done to this point. He might have been looking for some reason that he would no longer have to listen to what Jesus was saying. Well, isn't that still the same today? If a person can find hypocrites, then they think that they can just dismiss them and throw out what they're saying.

Simon must have been thinking something along the lines like this:

- "OK – If Jesus were a prophet, he would know people's character.
- And if Jesus knew this woman was a sinner, He would have nothing to do with her.
- Since Jesus has accepted this woman, He can't know her character.
- And since Jesus does not know this woman is a sinner, He cannot be a prophet.
- And since Jesus is not a prophet, I can reject Him.
- I can reject His message, and I can reject His ministry.
- Case closed. Bring on the next course!"

His assumption of what Jesus would do - was wrong – because he did not know Jesus. He may have invited him in, but there was no relationship. **Don't people do that today?**

It wasn't Simon's logic that was at fault, it was the fact that he based it all on a faulty premise. He assumed that holiness was first and foremost a matter of being "set apart." He assumed that holiness was achieved by keeping yourself separate from sin and from sinners – being isolated and aloof. According to this view, Jesus would have to shun this sinful woman in order to remain holy.

Simon apparently came to the conclusion that:

- Either Jesus didn't know this woman's character,
- Or that whether or not He knew about her sinfulness, He was physically contaminated by her, and thus could not be holy.

Wrong answer! Simon's view emphasizes God's holiness, **and** His high standards of what is good and right, but **he minimizes** God's compassion, love and true concern for people, not just what they do to mess up their lives.

Jesus was masterful here as He answers both views. He tells of two people who owe the creditor. One is obviously the woman, and she owes more. Simon is the other debtor. Being a Pharisee, he probably thought he didn't owe anything at all. Know anybody like that? He probably thought he was doing pretty well and he wasn't in need of forgiveness. He didn't need to love this man, Jesus. After all, he was a Pharisee, and he "was in" with God. But the truth is he did owe something. He was not perfect, though his life might have been cleaner than the woman's. He did not realize that he was a debtor as well. He

didn't have a clue! The irony of this story is this: the one with the most sins is the one who received the forgiveness. The woman was forgiven. **The key is repentance!**

You see, the woman may have been sinful but she was still seeking the Lord. She probably wasn't a faithful Jew; she probably didn't attend synagogue weekly, but she apparently loved the Lord more than the not-so-sinful person did. **Her actions had been sinful but her heart was loving and repentant.** Her actions and her heart did not line up, but that seems to be OK with Jesus, because He saw her heart. The sinful one was more in touch with Jesus than the righteous one – and she begged for forgiveness.

What's more, it would seem to me that the woman loved Jesus even before she was forgiven by Him: *"Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven.""* (Luke 7:48) But, the previous verse seems to say that her sins were already forgiven – Look at the back page of your Bulletin – and five lines from the bottom of the page – in today's Gospel - when Jesus said: *"Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love."* (Luke 7:47) Even before Jesus told his woman that she was forgiven, before she heard those very words, she was forgiven.

You know, it's quite difficult to decide if someone else is truly Christian or not. We have no Christ-o-meter – like you can read someone's blood pressure, or a stethoscope, or anything like it that could measure someone's level of Christianity. In many cases we only have our reputation. Here was a sinful woman who had been forgiven by Jesus. Her reputation worked against her. Even her actions worked against her. But Jesus saw her heart, which no one else saw. And Jesus knew that was good enough. Again, it's not up to us to decide if someone is a Christian or not. You can't really tell by church attendance or by political stripes or by reputation or even by actions. Only Jesus sees the heart, and that's where it's all decided. That's where a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is vital to life – eternal life.

So what does all this mean for us? Well, Simon's part tells us not to judge another person's spiritual health by their actions. That's good, but this isn't really about Simon. It's about the sinful woman and the love that she showed towards the Lord. This is about relationship and worship. And the point is not, "Who's been forgiven of more things?" The point is, "Who realizes all that they've been forgiven of?" It didn't matter how good the woman was, compared to someone else. All that mattered is that she loved the Lord. She realized how little she deserved to be with the Lord, and she was just grateful for what she did have. **She loved much because she was forgiven much.** She realized the awesome gift of grace in her life.

That, my brothers and sisters, is what this is all about. We are all sinful people – striving to be in relationship with the Lord of all. In today's Gospel, Jesus didn't deny or minimize the fact that this woman was sinful. You don't have to be perfect to come to church, which is unfortunately the image that some folks have given off over the years. That is, you have to be living right if you want to be here in God's house. I don't believe that is the image Jesus wants to be projected, after all who did Jesus eat with – tax collectors and sinners! We are called to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with everyone – to welcome everyone to know Him, and to teach them to obey everything that He has commanded. Please open your pew Bibles with me, to page 909; the powerful words that Jesus spoke just before leaving this world, ascending to the Father. **Matthew 28:17-20** *"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, 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 always, to the end of the age."* These are our orders – our marching orders. Go, Baptize, Teach, And Obey. Out of grateful obedience for who Jesus is, and what He has done in our

lives – we want to share His love with others. It is not doing in anticipation of getting something, no, instead it is doing out of gratitude for what has already been done and continues to be done in our lives. We are works in progress – being transformed each and every day – into the person God wants us to be. You've heard me say this before – **Jesus loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way.** When we are aware of our own sinfulness, repenting of that sinfulness - and when we are also aware of His perfection, our relationship with Jesus Christ deepens, and that's when worship happens. When we know how little we deserve, and yet God is good to us anyway, through His abundant grace -that's when worship happens.

Worship isn't about us. It's not about making us happy. It's not about singing the songs we like. Worship is about Jesus. The woman with the alabaster jar was preoccupied with Jesus. She didn't care that there were others there who looked down on her. She cared only about what her Lord thought about her. She didn't care how many hypocrites were around; her worship was focused on her Lord Jesus.

Worship is not about receiving something from God - it is giving something to Him. Jesus was approached by many people, most of whom wanted something from Him. Let's face it – If I lived in Jesus' day – long before joint replacements – I would have been a man on the mat and I would have wanted to come to Jesus for Him to heal my joints. Each one of us can relate to that – we have our own physical or emotional baggage. This woman's worship was expressed, not by her getting from Him, asking Jesus for something, but by her giving to Jesus. We are all guilty of times when our prayers are like a wish list for Santa. The majority of our prayers need to be praise and adoration alone, without any request, where our only desire is to be in His presence, soaking in His love.

So my brothers and sisters, Be thankful for the Lord's love. Be grateful to Him for allowing you to know Him and to return His love – in grateful obedience. Sometimes it's hard. There were reasons why this woman could have stayed away from Jesus and not worshipped Him.

- She wasn't invited, she wasn't wanted, She might be kicked out,
- She would be scorned, and besides - there would be hypocrites there.

But she worshipped Jesus anyway. Scripture doesn't tell us how she got in, but that's really not important. Can you imagine the courage that it must have taken?

Today - let us make a firm resolution in each of our lives to:

- Love Him;
- Honor Him;
- Respect Him.
- Obey Him.
- Spend time with Him.
- Spend time in His Word.
- Get to know Him better.
- Remember all that you've been forgiven of.
- Don't forget all His goodness and grace to you – and how much He loves you!

That will stimulate your worship – after all, **despite that fact that we are never perfect** – Jesus loves us so much that through His death on the cross – in our place, and our repentance - **we are perfectly forgiven!**