Sermon | Proper 6C

TEXT: Luke 7:36-50

12 June 2016

“*Big Forgiveness = Big Love*”

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

“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. And behold, a woman of the city began to wet his feet with her tears.”

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

Dear saints,

The simple message for today is this: **big forgiveness equals big love, but little forgiveness equals little love.** If you’ve been forgiven big, then your love for Jesus and your neighbor will be big. But if you’ve been forgiven small, your love for Jesus and your neighbor will be small. Big forgiveness equals big love. Little forgiveness equals little love.

And we see it in our story today. A woman comes to Jesus while he’s having his supper. She sneaks in behind him, sits at his feet. Takes an expensive bottle of perfume, breaks it open, and pours it on his feet. Then she begins to weep, tears of repentance, sadness over the sins of her past life. She washes his feet, kisses them, and dries them with her hair.

Now we know this kind of thing doesn’t happen every day. And in fact, I think if it were you or me, we would be quick to grab our hats and coats and make it to the door before anyone could say goodbye. This pretty awkward stuff, really embarrassing what’s going on here. Borders even on the scandalous. And yet, Jesus doesn’t tell her to stop touching him. He’s not ashamed, embarrassed by what she’s doing to him. He lets it happen. In fact, he receives it as a great act of love and worship.

Now we learn more about this woman. Luke tells us two things about her. First, she was a “woman of the city,” and second, “she was a sinner,” in other words, a known sinner, a notorious sinner, somebody with a reputation, and a rap sheet. I think it’s pretty easy to piece together who and what she was. This is last person you would expect to be a religious sort of person, a person of faith.

Now things get even more tense when we learn that the supper Jesus was having was in the house of a certain Pharisee named Simon. And they see this happening. You could picture them mid-bite, biting into a piece of, well, not pork chop—chicken or whatever—the see the woman, the smell of the perfume reaches their noses, choking them. They can hear the loud wails, the sobbing, the crying.

Now if any group of people we’re concerned about keeping up appearances, making themselves look good in front of others, it was the Pharisees. The Pharisees prided themselves on keeping God’s Law better than anyone else. They were God’s major league athletes, the best of the best. You couldn’t get more holy, righteous than a Pharisee—at least, that’s what they would have you think. And so they never would have let such a known sinner into their company defiling them, much less let her touch their feet.

Simon sees this woman come into his house. She’s not invited, doesn’t belong there. He sees what she’s doing to Jesus. He sees Jesus not rebuking her, but taking it all. And so he starts to think: “If this Jesus was any kind of a prophet, he would’ve known what sort of woman it was that was touching him.”

Well, it’s ironic, because Jesus does know the woman. And he also knows Simon, and can read the thoughts of Simon’s heart. Jesus says, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” Uh oh. “Say it teacher.” So he tells him a parable. “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed fifty. The other owed five-hundred. Neither could pay the debt. The moneylender cancels the debt of both. Now which will love him more?” “I suppose,” Simon replied, “the one that had a larger debt cancelled.”

“You’re right,” Jesus said. “The person with the larger debt, the person who is forgiven the larger debt, will have the larger love. Now look at this woman. I came in here. You gave me no water for my dirty feet. She hasn’t stopped washing them with her tears. You gave me no oil for my head. But she’s anointed my feet with costly perfume. You gave me no kiss of peace. She hasn’t stopped kissing my feet. And why? Why has she done all these things for me, Simon, and not you? Because she is the debtor who owed five-hundred. She’s the debtor who’s been forgiven more, and so, she loves me more.”

And this brings us back to our simply point for today: **big forgiveness equals big love. Little forgiveness equals little love.** If you’ve been forgiven big, then your love for Jesus and your neighbor will be big. But if you’ve been forgiven small, your love for Jesus and your neighbor will be small.

And we see it with this woman. We don’t know what she heard about Jesus that brought her to Jesus in the first place. What brought her to Jesus? Maybe it was rumor, “this man receives sinners and eats with them,” tax collectors, prostitutes, folks just as bad as herself. Maybe she heard his gracious invitation, “Come to me, all you that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And she thought, “I’m one of those weary, heavy laden ones.” Maybe she saw one of his miracles, his compassion in action, healing the centurion’s sick servant, raising the widow’s dead son.

We don’t know what she might’ve heard or saw, that brought her to Jesus. But whatever it was, it was the Gospel. The good news of the forgiveness of sins. And she believed the Gospel. She believed, “this Jesus will do for me, what he did for all those other people out there like me. He will receive me, not rebuke me. He will welcome me, not send me away. He will love me, not use me, abuse me, and then kick me to the curb like I don’t matter.” And she was right. She comes to him, and he forgives her, and he forgives her big. “Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.” And therefore, her love for him was big.

**Big forgiveness equals big love.**

Now, Simon the Pharisee, on the other hand, had no need for Jesus. No need for repentance. No need for forgiveness. Simon the Pharisee had himself. He had his own goodness, righteousness, moral superiority. Simon’s god was himself. And that’s who Simon trusted: in himself, in his works, in his power to please God, keep the Law on his own. Simon didn’t need Jesus, or the forgiveness Jesus came to bring. And so he wasn’t forgiven. In other words, he was forgiven small. And so his love for Jesus was small.

“You gave me no water for my feet. She wet my feet with her tears.”

“You gave me no oil for my head. She anointed my feet with perfume.”

“You gave me no kiss. She hasn’t stopped kissing my feet.”

“Why Simon? Why? Why does she love me more than you? Because she is the greater debtor, a great sinner in need of an even greater Savior. And I forgive her big. That’s why she loves me big. You see? **Big forgiveness equals big love.**”

Dear saints, how might we see ourselves in this story? How does it apply to us, in our lives? We all know how easy it is for us, in our fallen flesh, to start thinking of ourselves as better than others, and of others, as worse than ourselves. We know how easy it is to think of ourselves as the good ones, the moral ones, the righteous ones, so much better than the people around us. We look at other people, how they live, how they act. We see their sin, all the while blind to our own sin, and imagining that our sins are somehow less offensive to God than theirs. We’re up here. They’re down here. Well, that’s self-righteousness. And it comes from the little Pharisee that lives inside of every one of our hearts, yours and mine.

And that kind of thinking results in treating our neighbor judgmentally, condescendingly. And when our neighbor sins against us, our first reaction will not be to forgive them, but to hold it against them, to seek vengeance, to repay evil for evil. We’ll treat them like Simon treated the woman. And if we are this way—and I think we all have been at one point or another—is it not because we’ve lost sight of forgiveness? That we’ve been forgiven big? That we too are big sinners in need of a big Savior. And when we lose sight of the fact that we’ve been forgiven big, that’s when our love becomes small.

And so what’s the cure for our little love? The only cure for our little love is more forgiveness. That we come to Jesus once again, laying our sins at his feet, and hearing his word again. “I tell you, your sin is forgiven. Go in peace.” And dear saints, that why you’re here. You might’ve heard that word a thousand times. But look, you’ve lived a very hard week, with the devil, the world, and you own flesh, attacking you, seeking to destroy your faith. And so, you need to hear it again. Your Jesus suffered for you, died for you, was crucified for you, to ransom you from death and hell by the shedding of his blood. And Christ’s work for you is the ground of your being forgiven of God. “You are forgiven, go in peace.” And by the power of the Holy Spirit, he will transform your life through this word of Christ, so that big forgiveness will big love, for you, for me, toward our neighbor, now and forever.

*In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*