

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

June 20, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 7:36-50

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as 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. When 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." Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (NIV)

It goes against each and every impulse of our human nature and every single ounce of our human pride to be labeled as a loser, doesn't it? Who wants to be known as a loser? From little on kids will tease one another, put their fingers on their head in the shape of an "L," and give the insult "loser" to someone. Even though it is Father's day if you ask my children they will tell you that I don't like to lose any type of game. My wife even gets just a little bit upset with me at times when I refuse to let the kids win even the smallest of games. Sometimes I can even be a bit of a sore loser.

But the label loser isn't just for those who don't win at whatever game or competition they are in, it is a label thrown around at every stage in life. In high school, in the work place, in society, we often look at certain people we might label as losers. Those who are known as screw ups, those who get in the worst kind of trouble, those who really have made a mess out of their lives seem to fit that loser label the best.

But what about before God? What makes someone a winner or a loser in God's eyes? What would make someone a spiritual loser? Today, our lesson might open some eyes. This morning I pray God would change our minds about being labeled a loser for in this account we find a beautiful, wonderful truth: **Jesus Gives Life to Losers.**

Our text takes place at the house of a Pharisee named Simon. Simon would have been anything but a loser in the eyes of many. He was a Pharisee, a religious leader, a man of God who worked hard to uphold the law. He invites Jesus to a meal at his home.

We are not told his intentions for having Jesus over but by his actions perhaps he was looking (as was reported of the Pharisees in the chapter earlier) for a reason to accuse Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus accepts his dinner invitation and is ***“reclined at the table.”***

While Jesus is reclining at this table, which was probably more like a couch, an uninvited guest arrives - a woman. Listen to what this woman does as she approaches Jesus. ***“She brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as 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.”*** This woman brings some very costly perfume to honor Jesus. She stands behind Jesus and weeps and then she starts to wet His feet with her tears and wipes them with her hair. She covers Jesus’ feet with kisses and finally pours the perfume on them.

We are not told much about this woman who does all this. We are not even told her name. But we are told this is ***“a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town.”*** Her reputation is known and it is not a good one. In fact, as Simon witnesses her actions he doesn’t say a word but he is disgusted and thinks to himself: ***“If Jesus were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is –that she is a sinner.”*** Simon can’t believe Jesus would allow her even near Him. She was known throughout town as a loser. She was evidently in that class of “sinners” with the tax collectors and prostitutes that the Pharisees labeled as a sinner and an outcast of society. Those labeled as such were many times even shunned by their own families and most likely tossed out of the synagogue. Simon thinks if Jesus is truly a prophet he would know what this woman was like and wouldn’t even want her to touch Him.

But Simon was greatly underestimating Jesus by refusing to believe that He was even a prophet. For Jesus knew exactly who this woman was and what she was doing and why she was doing it! Reading Simon’s thoughts Jesus said: ***“Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said. “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*** This simple parable made the point so clear even Simon could not escape the obvious answer: ***“Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.”*** After telling Simon that he answered correctly Jesus now applies this parable. Turning toward the woman Jesus says 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. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”***

Simon did not even extend to Jesus some of the common courtesies of the day, but this woman went above and beyond to show Jesus her love and appreciation. Why? She recognized the debt of her sin. She realized what Jesus had come to give her - forgiveness and salvation. Her sins had been forgiven. Christ first loved her and now even if she, a known sinner, had to walk into the house of a Pharisee to show love for her Savior she was willing to do so to honor Jesus. Please understand Jesus is not telling Simon he doesn’t have many sins so that why he loves little. Simon too had a debt he

was unable to pay, but unlike this woman he did not see his many sins nor his great need for Jesus. So he loved little.

Then in front of them all and to reassure this uninvited guest Jesus turns to the woman. ***"Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."*** And even as the other guests were questioning Jesus' authority to say such a thing, Jesus added ***"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*** Out of all the people in Simon's house do you see the one who walks away with life and forgiveness - the loser. Jesus gives life to this sinful woman. He gives her a life of faith and forgiveness - a life full of hope and peace. In front of them all Jesus comforts her with the message that her sins are taken away and that she can go in peace. Jesus gives life to losers.

So where do we fit into all of this? Do we recognize like this woman that we are losers on our own, that we have made a mess out of things, that before God we are sinners who deserve only His wrath and punishment? Do we like David in our Old Testament reading, or Peter in our epistle, need to have someone come point out to us just how big of losers we really are? We too are murderers, and adulterers, and hypocrites at times like Peter was being. Doesn't just saying this go against every single impulse and ounce of pride we have? The little Pharisee in each of us doesn't want to admit we can't repay any of our debt to God.

Yet, what if I had someone follow you around every second of every day to examine all your words and actions? What if I had someone who could read every single thought that ever enters your head? Would you like that to be read and revealed? Why not? Because what people would see would not be so pretty, would it? We sin and we sin much. And God sees it all. Against every impulse we need to recognize the truth that we have an enormous debt - sin. We have all fallen far short of God's glory. We lack what we need to deserve anything from God much less life and salvation. We are losers. As hard as this is to admit, as much as it fights against our every natural tendency, we have to admit we are losers.

We need to recognize like David that we are the sinner who deserves to die, and to recognize like Paul that we are the worst of sinners. Why? Because then we are ready to hear the good news about Jesus who gives life to losers. For the Son and Man came to seek and save what was lost. There was only one person at this house party who was different and out of place. It was not Simon. It was not even this sinful woman. It was Jesus. He was different than the rest because He was the only one without sin. Yet, Jesus came to be the friend of sinners. He ate and drank with them. Jesus sat there and allowed this woman with this bad reputation to express her love for Him. Jesus did so because He came to be more than just a friend to sinners. He came to be their Savior. Jesus came to pay what we or any other sinners could never pay back - the debt of our sin. Jesus paid the price of our sin with His own precious blood and innocent suffering and death. On the cross He paid the great price our sins deserve and He won life for losers with His victory over the grave.

Now Jesus says to you and me, losers like this woman - ***"Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*** Only Jesus makes losers like us winners - winners in life and in death. Only Jesus saves. May we always remember this truth that God saved us not because of the righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy. As the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk writes: ***"the righteous will live by faith."*** (2) It is Jesus and only Jesus who gives life to losers.

I pray that knowing this wonderful, beautiful truth moves us like this woman to love much. I pray we wet Jesus' feet with our tears - tears of sorrow over sin - tears of repentance. I pray we honor Jesus with our lives and gifts. I pray we look for opportunities to serve Him. And I pray like Jesus we show love to others - even those we might sinfully consider losers. After all, Jesus gives life to losers. He gives life to us. May we share with all the Friend of sinners, the Savior who opens His forgiving arms so wide that all people are welcomed into them. Amen.

