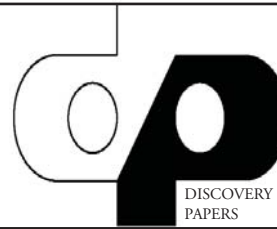


# COME TO JESUS

**SERIES: WORSHIP**



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Luke 7:36-50  
2nd Message  
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A kiss brings the sinner home; the love of God welcomes us to come home

There once was a father who had a beautiful son who got involved with drugs in high school and seemingly overnight was lost to them. For many, many years the father did not give up hope and tried everything he could to help his son, but nothing freed his son from the drugs. Finally, the father gave up and stopped trying with his son and went on to live his life without his son as best as he could. One night as the father lay sleeping the phone rang. It was two in the morning. It was the police and they told the father that they had his son down at the station and they wanted him to come get him. This was a very strange request because by now the man's son was an adult and they had not spoken in a very long time. He got up and quickly dressed and drove down to the station. When he arrived at the station the officer behind the desk knew nothing about the call he had received or anything about his son being arrested, but he did know about a house where the local druggies hung out nearby and maybe his son would be there. Confused and thinking perhaps he had come to the wrong police station or he was just going crazy he got back into this car to return home. But as he was driving home he sensed God's nudging to go to the house the officer had told him about. Stopping outside the darkened house he couldn't decide to go in or not – it all was so weird and ridiculous. But again he thought he heard a quiet voice say, "go inside." So the father got out of his car and walked up to the front door of the darkened, dilapidated house. Through the screen door he could look inside to the hallway of the house and he could see young men and women laying all over the floors obviously drunk or otherwise sleeping off some drugged state. He decided to go inside and stepped over some young people in the hallway. Peering into the living room area which was very dark he could perceive others sleeping on the floor and furniture. He made his way to the couch and looked down to see his son, sound asleep. He looked so much like the little boy he tucked in at night that he was awash with love and sadness. He bent down and kissed his son's cheek as he had when he was a little boy and he left.

Not too long after this event this father received a call at work from his son who asked if he would come meet him for lunch at a very nice local restaurant. The father was stunned by the call and anxiously waited until lunch not knowing whether to hope that his son would really show up. He didn't even know what to expect if his son were to show up. But the father was happily surprised when he arrived at their lunch spot and his son was sitting at a table waiting for him. He was cleaned up and had a nice

shirt and slacks on. He looked good. He told his dad that he had changed his life. He was looking for a job and had given up the drugs. He said he was sorry for all the pain he had caused. He explained that the night when his father had come into that darkened house he had pretended to be asleep, but he was awake. When his father kissed him on the cheek and left he came to his senses. He decided that night to straighten out his life and come home. This story is true.

The father in this story could have done many things that would have allowed his son to remain in self pity and self destructive behavior, but he disarmed him with love. Unmerited love is disarming because it is so unnatural. A drug addicted son does not deserve his father's love; it is not what a conceited daughter deserves, it is not what a selfish person deserves, it is not what any of us deserve, but love is what God offers everyone in this Son Jesus. In John's gospel we have heard the familiar 3:16 passage many times. We may have even seen it hung up on banners at football games, but have we responded to it? Perhaps a new way of saying it will make it come more alive to us. Eugene Peterson's *The Message* puts it this way: "This is how much God loved the world: he gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed. By believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again..." The disarming love of God has been made manifest in Jesus Christ who came to seek and save that which is lost. Will we accept his help? Will we allow love to put us right?

This morning we are going to hear of Jesus' encounter with a woman known only as a sinner. I have renamed her in my mind as the worshipping woman of Luke 7. You may find her in Luke chapter 7:36-50, our text for this morning. Last week we heard that the root of the Hebrew word for worship means to bow down. We learned that thankfulness, praise, boasting in God, seeking him always and remembering who he is and what he has done are responses of worship or bowing down before God. Today we add confession to these responses of worship and see how love for God and others is the overriding response of worship that gives God glory. The woman of Luke 7 personifies true worship.

## Background

In Luke's gospel we meet this woman early enough in the ministry of Jesus that the resistance of the Pharisees

and Scribes to Jesus has not come to the point of total rejection and persecution. It is far enough along in Jesus' ministry in Galilee however that he has gathered a huge crowd of followers attracted to him for his miracle working, and teaching. Immediately preceding our passage for this morning Jesus has been in the small town of Nain where he raised a widow's son from the dead. It is unclear whether he is still in Nain or has moved on to some unnamed town when he comes to the home of Simon the Pharisee who has invited him to dinner.

Pharisees in Jesus day were important and quite well off. It was customary to host itinerate rabbis into their homes for a meal as a way to continue hearing more of their teaching. Jesus, who is attracting a lot of interest in the community, is certainly worthy of the Pharisee's attention. What makes Jesus more intriguing is that he is reputed to hang out with sinners. No Pharisee or rabbi worth his salt would hang out with sinners in Jesus' day for fear of being defiled by their company. What was one to make of a rabbi and gifted miracle worker who dined with sinners? Simon invites Jesus over to check him out.

Verses 36-38:

**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.**

## Setting the scene

This is a strange scene which needs some explaining. At important dinners like this the tables were set out in a large U shape. Guests reclined on cushions with their left elbows resting on the table and their feet facing away from the table or outward.

The sinful woman of our story approaches Jesus from behind and so the first thing she sees are Jesus' feet. The word for sinful here has a sexual connotation so she is a prostitute. How a local prostitute could come into a Pharisee's home is most likely explained by her being a part of the crowd following along with Jesus. The people accompanying a visiting rabbi were allowed to stay and listen to the teaching and conversation between the Pharisees and rabbi. They lined the outer walls of the dining hall and were allowed to listen from the open air courtyard that most of these homes had.

Having come along with the crowd she may have run home to grab her expensive perfume to bring to Jesus as a gift, or she used the amulet which hung around her neck on a long cord to perfume Jesus' feet. Women all wore perfume bottles around their necks to freshen up with. What is interesting about hers is that it is alabaster which was very expensive and most women did not carry these

unless wealthy. So, she is either successful at her trade or this perfume was a gift from a wealthy client, but whatever the case, it was costly perfume with which she anointed Jesus feet.

As this "sinful" woman approaches Jesus from behind she becomes overwhelmed in his presence and starts to weep so steadily that she notices her tears have wet Jesus' feet. This was not her intention and she quickly wipes her tears away with her hair perhaps thinking that her tears are defiling Jesus. She acts quickly to dry them. Using her hair as a towel she dries his feet and then overcome begins to kiss his feet and pours her very expensive perfume on them. It is a shockingly intimate scene for the onlookers to witness. For women only took their hair down with their husbands at home and never in public. What she was doing was a scandal.

And what does this scene look like to the hosting Pharisee? It looks like the report about Jesus hanging out with sinners was more than true. It looked even worse up close for he was willing to let a prostitute minister to him like this in public with no rebuke!

Verse 39:

**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."**

Luke gives us a view into the Pharisee's thoughts. The Pharisee had wondered if Jesus was a prophet, but now he knew Jesus could not be for if he was he would have had insight into this woman's background and rejected her overtures to him. The Pharisee has come to a completely erroneous conclusion. What he thinks he sees, is not what Jesus sees with his spiritual insight. Jesus does not see a sinner in this woman who was a prostitute, what Jesus sees is *her*. You know, to be really seen by Jesus – to have him look in your eyes, and really understand all about you. where you have come from, all the pain that you have been through, all the destruction that has been your life, and then to look with unconditional love into your eyes must be overwhelming (in a very, very good way). This is what I believe she experienced. Jesus receives her because he knows her tears are those of a grateful woman who is responding to Him with great humility and love, but I get ahead of myself.

## Jesus tells Simon a riddle to clear up his vision problem

Verses 40-43:

**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.**

The first thing that is revealed in verse 40 is that Jesus answered Simon's thoughts. I think this is kind of funny. I imagine it made Luke laugh writing this down. Jesus answered Simon's thoughts. Well, if Simon was wondering if Jesus were a prophet I think Jesus just might have proved it. But I also think there is something in this for us to learn as well. We are not going to read anyone else's thoughts of course, but Jesus paid such close attention to people that he may have been able to discern Simon's thoughts and attitude just in knowing Pharisees and how they looked at the world. So Jesus tells Simon a little riddle. One he knows Simon will answer correctly. These little riddles or parables were often told by Pharisees and rabbis to explain spiritual truth, so Simon was well versed in this teaching technique and how to respond.

Obviously 500 *denarii* is a greater amount than 50 *denarii*. We can think of *denarii* as silver or gold pieces or any kind of money because *denarii* was common currency back then. The point of the riddle is that neither debtor is able to pay back his debt. If I owe Chase Manhattan Bank \$300 and I can't pay, and you owe them \$300,000 and can't repay the end result is that we are both in default. Neither of us can pay--period. We are both debtors.

Jesus is generous to Simon in this riddle for he invites Simon to see himself as the debtor who owes 50 *denarii*, while she is the debtor who owes much more. It would have been impossible for Simon to believe he was on equal footing before God with this prostitute even though that was the case. He thought being a good Pharisee was getting him somewhere. Jesus cleverly gives Simon enough room to see himself in this riddle as the one who has lived a better life and owes less to God, but is nevertheless still in debt. Will he see himself in the riddle? Will he understand that he owes a debt to God which he cannot pay and come to Jesus?

Simon's unenthusiastic correct answer to the question of who will love the moneylender more, "I suppose the one who had a bigger debt canceled" lets us know that Simon is not yet ready to respond to Jesus' invitation to "Come, receive me and the forgiveness I offer you." Simon's response is disappointing. He knows the right answer and he understands what Jesus is implying, but he is not ready to believe he needs a savior. I wonder whether Simon is having a harder time accepting that the sinful woman can be forgiven, or that he himself is one who needs forgiveness. It is a moot point, for Simon remains spiritually blind and in his sins while she is free to worship God in grateful humility.

The gift of confrontation of our sin

But Jesus is not through with Simon by any means. And I mean that in a very hopeful way. Jesus continues to

talk to Simon. He does not condemn him for giving an unbelieving response. He does not judge him here either, but he confronts Simon's blindness and shows him his sin directly. It is a gift that Jesus directly shows Simon his sin. If he did not directly confront Simon it might mean that there was no hope for Simon but because he is direct with Simon I think Simon might actually have a hope of seeing himself for the sinner he is. It is a gift when he reveals our sin to us as well, for it means he is bringing it to our attention so that we might come to Jesus and receive the forgiveness that we need. 1John 1:9-10 says "if we confess our sins, he who is faithful will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word is not in us." When we confess our sins God is faithful to forgive our sins. Simon's debts were cancelled if he would only admit he was a debtor. How hard is that? We should be much more afraid of Jesus not talking to us about our sin, than being confronted with it. For God's purpose in bringing sin to our attention is so that we might see it, confess it, and give it to Jesus so we can be rid of it and begin anew. Jesus wants Simon to see his sin so he comes to Him for forgiveness and new, whole life.

Verses 44-47:

**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."**

Jesus is looking at the woman but talking to Simon. Why? He wants the woman to know that he really sees her. Jesus is talking to Simon, but she is where our focus needs to go. She is our example to follow. She is what worshiping God is all about. She had done all of these acts for Jesus out of love. And Jesus tells us why: she loves much in response to being forgiven much. Will her magnetic love draw Simon and the onlookers to come to Jesus too? Jesus says to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" The answer has been up until now no. He has neither seen himself or the woman with spiritual eyes, so Jesus tries to wake Simon up with letting him know exactly how he has sinned in Jesus' presence.

No Welcome for Jesus

Jesus accuses Simon of breaking the laws of hospitality. This may seem a small thing to us but it was not to a Middle Easterner and it was a spiritual responsibility for Israel. Israel was to welcome the nations of the earth to worship Yahweh their God. It was their call as God's people to offer hospitality to aliens and strangers for these were the ones they were to draw into relationship with the true God, the God of Israel. When Jesus says, "I came into your



house and you did not offer any water for my feet,” this is a very pointed accusation and obviously true. Washing the feet of a guest was a customary act of welcome in Jesus day. They wore sandals and the dusty streets made their feet dirty. When guests came into a home their sandals were left at the door and a servant washed their feet with water and dried them with a towel. Simon did not give this common courtesy to Jesus – it was dishonoring and considering that Jesus was the guest of honor it was an all too obvious omission. This woman seeing these slights made up for them as she could by washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. What an intimate act of love this is. Next Simon did not give Jesus a kiss of greeting on the cheek which was a normal welcome for your guest, but the woman Jesus says has not stopped kissing my feet. The face and head were the esteemed parts of the human body in their culture. The feet are the lowliest parts of the human body. To kiss the face was one thing, to cover his feet with kisses was a supreme act of humility. Simon did not anoint Jesus’ head with olive oil (a cheap oil) which was customary. She anointed his feet, the lowliest part of his body with expensive perfume. For every act which Simon omitted she has done them and so much more. It is reflective of their hearts. Simon has not received Jesus with welcome, and this sinful woman has made a home in her heart for Jesus and cries tears of joy at her forgiveness. I just heard this great expression: Tears are liquid prayers. This woman was shedding liquid prayers and Jesus loved them. See the comparison? Every inhospitable act that Simon did to Jesus she has corrected with a much greater act of love and devotion.

It is not that she has done this act of hospitality which has caused her to be forgiven. Rather being forgiven she has responded with this act of love.

The irony in this story is that when God himself comes in the form of Jesus Christ the religious rulers of Israel offer him no welcome, while the sinners and outsiders welcome him with great joy. For the sinners knew they needed saving while Simon and many in Israel thought they were fine just as they were. They were good people after all, respectable, not sinners.

I have a confession: I can see myself in Simon.

When I was in my mid to late twenties I flew back and forth to New York and Los Angeles about once a month. I was getting to be one of those seasoned travelers who gets on the plane quickly finds their comfortable seat by the window and hunkers down with a book or some work and ignores the other passengers. The message was clear from my body language “stay away, I am working.”

One trip to LA made that very difficult to do, because the entire plane was filled except for about three business travelers with Vietnamese refugees, who were commonly called “boat people” at that time. These refugees were fleeing Cambodia and Vietnam for their very lives. Many had to pile onto boats buying passage with all the money they could possibly muster. The boats themselves were very dangerous with unscrupulous men stealing from these

poor people and even pirates taking them hostage. Many perished trying to flee. These were sad times. Many of the refugees that came to America then had not been processed for health issues because there were so many and it was such an emergency to get them out, so at the time on the West Coast at least there was a scare about tuberculosis being among this group.

So, I get on a plane, get my window seat, and hunker down to read, and I am surrounded by coughing, hacking, very sick people from across the globe. Fearing TB, I decide that if I look out the window and try to contain my breathing to small intakes I might survive the flu if that is what is making them sick, but I knew I was lost if it was TB.

Anyway, two very young women about 5 years younger than I was at the time sat in the seats next to me. I could feel their eyes on me, and the one sitting next to me was really trying to get my attention. But I kept my eyes on the prize and hoped for LA to come quickly. Finally, I had to give up due to her persistent questions and her nudging me. But I could tell that what she was asking was not really what she wanted to say because she would smile at me so big and then seemed to hold back what she wanted to know. I imagine she got up her courage and looking at and touching the hair comb I had in my hair, said to me, “So, beautiful.” Then she touched the velour dress I was wearing, and said again, “So beautiful.” Well, that was it. I was broken. I really looked at her. She was very tiny physically, and so young, and dressed in Salvation Army clothes, and I could see she was scared and all I saw in her at first glance was a problem I might get sick from contact with her. What she needed when she got to America was a smile, love and welcome, but sadly she got me. Too bad. I wanted to undress and give her my hair combs and dress after that I was so ashamed and humbled. We talked for the rest of the flight –her English was quite good. I’ll never forget that humbling encounter on that plane to LA. It showed me something about me. And I didn’t like it. I can be like Simon too.

Jesus invites community to see this new woman of faith

Verses 48-50:

**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.”**

Jesus concludes this encounter in Simon’s home facing the woman still and declaring before everyone, “Your sins are forgiven.” This is not the first time she has received forgiveness but Jesus is restating it so that the whole community can know and she can hear his words in her ears for the rest of her life, “your sins are forgiven.” Then he adds, “your faith as saved you, go into peace.” Again, it was

not her act of love which saved her but her faith in Jesus saved her. Her love was her response to the reality that she was no longer sinner, but a woman of God.

## Conclusion

Our story remains open ended for Simon. Will Simon get the point of his encounter with Jesus some time in the future and come to Jesus for the forgiveness he needs and let Jesus put him in right relationship with God? Will the worshipping woman's community see her changed life and come to Jesus some day as well drawn by her magnetic love? Will we come this morning to Jesus? If you have never received Jesus as your Lord and Savior – Come. Ask Jesus to forgive your sins; he is faithful to forgive your sins... and he will give you new whole life. For those of us who know Jesus the question this story asks us is this: will we extend the kiss of love to those around us perishing today in their sins and brokenness? The father's love disarmed his son's resistance and he came home in our opening story. The worshipping woman's tears of love for Jesus have disarmed generations who have heard this story and been encouraged to follow in her footsteps.

Love isn't always easy. We forget to be grateful forgiven people sometimes. We grow weary of doing good, we tire of being patient, we get mad at sin and the damage it does all around us. We will have to admit that we lack love and are often more concerned for our welfare than the welfare of others. Perhaps we will have to confess as I did, that our fears of getting sick by hanging out with sick people is really just another way of walking away from the love that Jesus wants us to offer the world through us. We will have to come to Jesus often asking Jesus to give us what we need to be lovers in this world, for our world is broken and dirty and sometimes not easy to love. But God loves it and sent his Son to save it, and we that know him have been graced with forgiveness and new life, so we get to love it too. That is our mission. That is our calling. Love God, love our neighbors.

In that light, I want to lead us in a few minutes of confession. Picture a platter as a metaphor for coming to God and laying our worries, fears, tiredness, concerns, disappointments and our sins, which I have defined here as ways in which we have failed to love God and failed to love people. We may even have failed to love passively by not doing something God has asked us to do. You may imagine placing them on this platter, or you may pray and write them down as a way of getting them out in prayer before God. Placing them on this imaginary platter is a

picture of giving them to God so they are no longer yours. They are gone to God. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus said to pray like this, "Our father... forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." We come and confess our sins to Jesus so that we and he are in agreement. It is our way of saying, "Oh, yes, I see what I just did, or thought Lord, thanks for showing that to me, here it is. I confess it and give it to you. Please forgive me. Please keep me from repeating it over and over, but if I do please keep me coming to you. Don't let sin get a foothold in my life, keep the evil one from tripping me up." Thank you Jesus for faithfully leading me in this life and on to the next, for canceling my debt and gifting me with new, whole life.

May we hear Jesus' words always in our ears, "Your faith has saved you: go into peace."

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