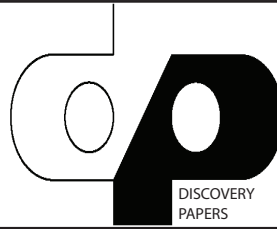


EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

**SERIES: INVITED: STORIES OF
WELCOME IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE.**



Catalog No. 20160807
Luke 7:36-50
5th Message
Dan Westman
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Earlier this week, I caved in and downloaded Pokemon Go.

If you are not one of the 100 million people who have downloaded this game on your smartphone, let me briefly explain. Pokemon Go is an augmented reality video game in which a mythical world maps onto our world. So in order to walk somewhere in the game, you actually have to walk there in real life.

The goal of the game is to catch these creatures, called Pokemon, by walking around until you find one. When you do find one, you swipe up to throw a Pokeball at the Pokemon and hopefully catch it in the ball.

Virtually everywhere that you go in public these days, you can find people catching Pokemon. You can tell because they will be walking around, looking down at their phone. All of the sudden they will stop, lift up their phone, and start doing this weird dance as they try to catch it.

There are a few different types of Pokemon go players.

There are some who are bashful players. This is me right now. As I walk around trying to catch Pokemon, I do everything I can to make it look like I am *not* trying to catch Pokemon. I try to be as inconspicuous as possible. So every time I find a Pokemon, I find myself glancing around to see if anyone is watching before stopping to try to catch it.

Some other players are moderately invested. These people don't feel self-conscious about playing Pokemon in public, but they are able to recognize that this game is actually not real life. They are able to maintain a healthy perspective while playing Pokemon, and can still interact with others while hunting for Pikachu.

But there is a third set of players—let's call them completely absorbed players. For these people, when they are playing Pokemon Go, nothing else matters. They completely forget that they are living in the real world where there are real people... and really dangerous

things. Two men walked off a cliff in Encinitas while playing. Others have fallen into ditches, walked into traffic, and done many other dangerous and foolish things in their attempt to "Catch 'em all!"

I'm sure that none of these people intended any of this to happen. But, they had become so absorbed—so captivated—by this game, that nothing else seemed to matter. They didn't care what others might have been thinking as they watch them. They didn't care about any other obligations they may have been avoiding while playing. For them, everything else seemed to fade away as they focused on their mission at hand.

Today, we are going to look at a story in Luke 7:36-50. In this story, we find a woman who is *completely absorbed* with Jesus. She has no regard for what others think of her. She has no concern for what else she could or should be doing. It's as if she has tunnel vision, and the only thing that matters to her is showing Jesus extravagant love. What brought her to this place? How is she able to block everything else out as she devotes herself to loving her Savior? We will see as we work our way through this passage.

Last week, we were in the beginning of Luke 7. Today, we are at the end. But before we get there, let me summarize a few things that happened between last week's passage and this one.

After Jesus healed the centurion's servant in Capernaum, Jesus and his disciples went to a town called Nain. As they are getting there, they come across a funeral processional. So, Jesus does what we all do when we come across a funeral processional—he raises the dead man to life.

Luke 7:16-17:

Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

So everyone hears what Jesus has done, and people start making judgments about Jesus based on this. For some people—at least for those who witnessed the miracle—they believe that Jesus is a great prophet sent from God. Who but God could do something like this!

But the Pharisees aren't so sure. In fact, most of the Pharisees believe exactly the opposite about Jesus. When they look at Jesus, they are not impressed by the miracles that he has done. They are not impressed that he raised a man from the dead. Rather, what stands out to the Pharisees is Jesus' distasteful social habits.

We find their assessment of Jesus in 7:34, "Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."

Look at this man—he eats and drinks with sinners! A prophet? A man of God? He's a glutton and a drunkard! A "friend of sinners"...

As we were trying to pick a title for this series, "Friend of Sinners" was one of the options that we were considering, but we thought it might be a hard sell for people who wanted to invite friends to church. "Hey, you should come to church with me this summer. We are doing a series called Friend of Sinners. I was thinking of all of the sinners that I knew and you came to mind... so you should come check it out!" In the end, we decided that "Invited" was a little more welcoming.

But, in actuality, this is a frequent charge that the Pharisees brought against Jesus. They viewed him as a friend of sinners, and in their minds, that was not a good thing.

In our story today, we meet a Pharisee named Simon. Simon has undoubtedly heard about Jesus. He has heard about these miracles. He has heard people talk about him as a great prophet. But he has also heard his fellow Pharisees attack Jesus and discredit him. Simon decided that he needs to take a closer look into this matter so, he invites Jesus to his house for dinner.

An Interrupted Dinner Party

Luke 7:36-39:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of

ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

I'm not sure about you, but I've never been to a dinner party quite like this one. At first it seems quite ordinary. Jesus arrives at the Pharisee's house (whose name we're later told is Simon) and finds his place at the table along with the other guests.

Then a woman enters the room.

It might seem quite odd to us to have to have a stranger walk into your dinner party.

Last weekend, my wife and I had a few friends over for brunch on Saturday. We were sitting at our kitchen table, which is right next to a big window that looks out the front of our house. We live in a duplex, and our unit is at the back of the property. The way that it is set up, you have to walk around the first unit and down a path to get to our front door. What this means is that the only people who come to our front door are friends that we have invited or the UPS guy dropping off a package.

But last weekend, as we were having brunch with our friends, we saw two complete strangers walking down the path and towards our front door... no package in hand. We all stopped and looked at them. Do you know who that is? No, do you know? Nope.

When we answered the door, we found out that they were looking for a different house. But until we knew that, there was kind of an uncomfortable feeling in the room. Why are these strangers walking up to our house? Do we know them?

But in the ancient world, life was lived much more publicly than it is today. People still had private property, but it was much less private than it is today. Houses were often built with an open courtyard in the middle. When you were having a dinner party, your guests would gather around the table in this courtyard. But there would also be room around the perimeter of the courtyard, and anyone would be welcome to stroll in off the street and observe—or maybe even participate in—your dinner conversation. So it was actually not very strange to have someone wander in to a dinner party like this.

But there was something very strange about this situation. It wasn't the woman's presence.

It was her reputation.

The ESV Bible describes her as a “woman of the city.” This is not an official title. It's not a euphemism for something else. It actually just means that she lived in the same town where Simon lived.

However, the only thing that we are told about her is that she is a sinful woman, and everyone knew she was a sinful woman. This woman had earned for herself a reputation as a sinner. In all likelihood, she was a prostitute. This would have been the kind of career that would have earned her such a reputation. Her sins would have been on display for the public.

As a prostitute, this woman would have been poor and marginalized. In that world, as is usually the case in our world, one did not choose to become a prostitute because they wanted to. Rather, one was forced into it—either literally sold into prostitution by her parents or else forced into it because it was the only way that she could make enough money to survive.

As a prostitute, she was a victim. But she was viewed as anathema. Unclean. A sinner. And when she walked into the party, everybody felt uncomfortable.

But then she walks over to Jesus, and this is when things start to really get uncomfortable.

Jesus was lying down at the table—as people did in that day—with his legs stretched out behind him. The woman comes up behind him and begins to cry, to sob. The word uses here is a word often used to describe a rainfall. Her tears are pouring out of her eyes and onto Jesus' feet. And she washes his feet. She uses her hair to wipe them dry and began to kiss them. Then she takes out an alabaster flask of ointment—a jar full of expensive perfume—and she anoints Jesus' feet.

Each of these actions were culturally significant, and we will see how a bit later. But for now, just imagine the scene that this is creating. Everyone can see her at Jesus' feet and hear her weeping. They could possibly even smell the perfume that she was using. Even if she was not trying to draw any attention to herself, and I'm sure she was not, everyone would have been watching what was happening.

Simon gets upset. Simon is not bothered by her actions. At least he makes no mention of that. Rather,

Simon is bothered that Jesus lets *this* woman touch him—that he would be associated with *this* woman—because she is a sinner.

In that moment, Simon makes up his mind about Jesus. A prophet? No way. If this man were a prophet, he would know *who* and *what sort of woman this is*. And he would have nothing to do with her.

What is Simon saying here? It might seem at first glance like he is questioning Jesus' prophetic knowledge. If Jesus were really a prophet, he would know who this woman was. But Jesus surely knew who this woman was. He knew that she was a sinner. Everybody knew she was a sinner.

So Simon is not questioning Jesus' prophetic knowledge. Rather, he is questioning his purity. If Jesus is really a prophet, then he would not let a sinful woman touch him in this way. He would not let this woman contaminate him in this way. If he was a man of God, he would tell this woman to keep her distance.

But Jesus is not put off by this woman or her reputation or her past. He does not reject her or keep her at a distance. He is not afraid that her impurity will rub off on him. Instead, he accepts the woman as she is.

Thank God that he does the same for us. He doesn't require that we clean ourselves before we come to him. He doesn't require that we get our lives together before we pray. Instead, he invites us in just as we are.

Notice in verse 39 that as Simon is expressing his judgment about Jesus, he does so “to himself.” Perhaps this was just a thought in his mind. Perhaps he mumbled it under his breath. Either way, he did not intend for Jesus to hear. But Jesus does hear—or he may even perceive Simon's thought—and he responds in verse 40.

The Parable of Two Debtors

Luke 7:40-43:

And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.” 41 “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

As Jesus addresses Simon, he says, in affect, “Simon, we need to talk”—words that nobody wants to hear from their significant other, much less from Jesus.

He then proceeds to tell a parable. In this parable, there are two men who both owe money to a moneylender. One owes five hundred denarii and the other, fifty denarii (one-tenth as much). These were significant, though not outrageous amounts of money—fifty denarii being about 2 months’ wages and five hundred denarii being nearly two years’ wages. In today’s world, this could be an auto loan and a mortgage (though perhaps not a home in the Silicon Valley).

In both cases, the men were unable to pay back the debt. And in both cases, the moneylender forgave the debt in full.

“Which of these two men would love the moneylender more?” Jesus asks. Simon answers with the obvious and correct answer, “The one for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” Exactly.

Now, Simon was a smart man. And parables were a familiar form of teaching in that day. So he would have known that this parable was meant to teach a lesson, and that the characters in the story were representative of certain people. How would Simon have understood this parable?

The moneylender is God. We all owe a debt to him. Simon understands this concept. That’s why Pharisees work so hard to follow God’s law, so as to minimize the debt and work to pay off that amount that they do owe.

Then there are the two debtors. It’s not a stretch for Simon to think that this must be the woman and himself. And clearly he is the one with the smaller debt, and she is the one with the larger debt. “Ten times larger? At least!” he thinks.

Then comes the surprising part. The moneylender *completely forgives the debt*. This was unprecedented generosity, and it would have taken Simon off-guard.

There was a similar parable that was told by other rabbis at the time. In this parable, the moneylender (God) has two people that owe him money. One is his friend and the other is his enemy. The lender allows his friends to pay back the debt over time, but requires immediate payment from his enemy. In this parable, God is still viewed as acting graciously toward his friends, but he still requires payment. But from his enemy, he requires immediate justice.

So the idea that God would completely forgive our sins without requiring anything from us would have been very surprising for Simon. And it is also surprising—to the point of being unbelievable—to many today.

While Simon assumed that he was the one with the smaller debt, Jesus never says this. He does make it clear later that the woman has a large debt. And he knew Simon would assume that he had the smaller debt. But Jesus wants Simon to understand that he too has a debt. It is not a small, insignificant debt that can be worked off. It is a huge debt, perhaps as large as this woman’s.

The difference between Simon and this woman, I am convinced, is not the amount of sin in their lives. Rather, it was the type of sin. The sins of this woman were socially unacceptable sins—sins that everyone in their culture could agree were wrong. And she was stigmatized because of them. But Simon was also a sinner. He was full of pride, selfishness, and self-righteousness. He lacked compassion and generosity. He was judgmental. But nobody had a problem with these sins. In fact, people looked at his self-righteousness and admired it! What a great man of God this is—look at how holy he is! Simon was blind to his own sin. He could not see that inside he was really no different than this woman.

In different ways, we are all either like Simon or like the woman. We are all sinners. We are all a mess inside. The only question is whether we recognize our mess. Some of us are very good at not looking messy. We are very good at looking like we have everything together. We’ve got a good job. We are making a name for ourselves at work. We’ve got a good-looking family. We have friends. Everyone likes us.

And yet inside, we are a mess. Maybe we try to deny it, maybe we don’t. But inside, we are a mess. We don’t pray as much as we should. We get angry at our spouse and kids. We are struggling with addiction. We are consumed by what others think of us. Inside, we are all a mess. And the first step to cleaning up the mess—the first step to dealing with our sin—is recognizing it. Being honest with ourselves. We need to stop lying to ourselves and everyone around us and admit that we don’t have everything together. That we need help. That we need a Savior. We need to recognize our mess and let other people see it as well.

I had the privilege of leading the Senior’s Bible Study this week while Scott Grant was at Camp PBC. We were studying this passage together and talking about these ideas. Then somebody shared a story about when he was first exploring Christianity.

He had just started to look into different churches. One week, he found his way to an Episcopal church. Part way through the service, a homeless man walked in. He made his way down the aisle and took a seat in one of the pews. This man was dirty. He probably didn't smell very good. In many ways, he appeared to be a mess. But he sat down and joined the service, just like everybody else.

As the gentleman at Bible study shared about this, he said, "I had everything together on the outside, but I knew I was a mess inside. When I saw this homeless guy sit down in front of me, I thought, *"If he is welcome here, then I am welcome here."*

We need to be a church of messy people. When we let other people into our mess, we send them the message that messy, sinful people are welcome here. We are all messy, so let's be messy together! Let's be honest about who we really are. It's necessary for your sake, but it's also necessary for the sake of those sitting around you.

Simon did not recognize his own sinfulness, but the woman did recognize hers. And she also knew that as great as her sin was,—as great as her debt was—it had been erased completely and forgiven by Jesus. Her awareness of her own sin is what made that forgiveness so sweet.

Jesus is going to make this exact point as he continues.

Great Forgiveness Leads to Great Love

Luke 7:44-47:

Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Here, Jesus is highlighting the significance of what the woman had done for him. Each of these actions had to do with hospitality.

It was common courtesy for a host to have a bowl of water for his guests to wash their feet upon arriving. After walking the dusty roads of Galilee in sandals, it was nice to be able to clean up a little. Simon had neglected this duty, but the woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

It was also customary to greet one's guests with a kiss on the hand or the cheek, especially if this guest was a rabbi. This too, Simon had neglected. But the woman kissed Jesus' feet over and over

While it was not required, hosts often chose to anoint the forehead of their guests with a dab of olive oil upon arrival. Simon did no such thing, but the woman anointed Jesus' feet with an expensive ointment.

In recounting all of these things, Jesus is saying, "Simon, you have been a terrible host. You have not even extended the most basic of courtesies to me. But this woman, who had no reason to treat me in this way, has gone over and above in this incredible display of love and gratitude. She has been forgiven much, so she loves much. But you don't feel the need to be forgiven much at all, and so you have no capacity to love me."

Simon was a sinner, but he failed to recognize it. But the woman was well aware of her sin. She knew how large of a debt she had towards God. But she had also experienced a miracle. She had been totally and completely forgiven of her debt. And her awareness — both of her great sin and the even greater forgiveness that she has received — overflowed in this extravagant display of love for Jesus her Savior.

Do you respond to Jesus in this way? Do you love him in extravagant ways, with no regard for what others may think? Have you experienced God's love and forgiveness in such a powerful way that you can't help but respond to him with overwhelming love?

This woman was not trying to earn Jesus' affection or forgiveness. No, she had already experienced this forgiveness. She had probably had a previous encounter with Jesus in which she learned of his great love and forgiveness. And now she must pour out her love in response. What a sweet picture of a life transformed by the Gospel.

As our story ends, Jesus says one last thing in verses 48-50.

Forgiveness, Faith, and Peace

Luke 7:48-50:

**And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”
49 Then those who were at table with him
began to say among themselves, “Who is this,
who even forgives sins?” 50 And he said to the
woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

When Jesus claims to have forgiven this woman’s sin, Simon and his other guests get upset. Who is this, who thinks he has the power to forgive sins. Only God can do that!

Exactly. Only God can do that. He is the only one who can forgive sin. He is our only hope for dealing with our sin—for cleaning up our mess. He is the only way to eternal life.

After the woman had experienced this gift of life, Jesus turned to her—just as he turns to us—and said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Conclusion

As I was preparing this message, the Lord was taking me on an emotional journey.

When I thought about the woman, I saw myself in her. I am a sinner with a huge debt before a holy God. Many of you don’t know me that well yet, so that might come as a bit of a surprise to you. But just ask my wife Linzy after the service if you have any doubts, and she will be able to set you straight. Facing the sin in your life is never a fun thing to do, and I began to feel a bit discouraged.

Then I started thinking about Simon. He was also a sinner, but he didn’t realize how bad he actually was. And I realized that I, too, am Simon—I often don’t acknowledge all of my sin—and I try to appear as if I am better than I actually am. So if I was feeling low when I thought I was the woman, I started to feel really low after realizing that I was also Simon.

But then I was reminded of the whole point of this story: *in order to love God deeply, we must understand the depth of our sin and the greatness of his forgiveness.* As I thought about this, I was filled with love and gratitude for God and all that he has done for me.

This week, I hope that you might be able to go on a similar journey with the Lord. Spend some time thinking about your sin. Confess it to the Lord. But don’t get stuck there. Rejoice in the incredible gift of forgiveness that we have received in Jesus. And then respond with extravagant love as you become completely absorbed with our great God.