

4TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 16, 2013

PURIFIED THINKING

Pastor Jim Dunn

(My understanding of this parable as expressed in this sermon is heavily dependent on Kenneth Bailey's interpretation of this parable)

Luke 7:36-8:3

A Sinful Woman Forgiven

36 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." **40** 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." **44** 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."

48 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."

Women Accompanying Jesus

8 Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, **2** and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, **3** and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them **[b]** out of their means.

On this Father's Day, in honor of the first earthly father, we are going to take a little fill-in-the-blank test on fruit and dirt. The Lord God formed Adam from the _____ of the ground. God blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, "Be _____ and multiply..." Adam said, "The woman You put here with me gave me some _____ from the tree and I ate it. The Lord said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and eat _____. The Lord said to Adam, "Cursed is the _____ because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field."

You passed the test! You know the difference between fruit and dirt. Do you know also that wrong actions and hurtful words are fruit? Do you know that the dirt in which they grow is one's heart? Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, and slander." (Matthew 15:19) In other words, the devil plants the seeds. The heart is the fertile soil for his temptations. Including the temptation to judge others, even when we know better.

Simon the Pharisee knew better. But right at that moment he was tempted to think that he knew all about dirt. And He thought Jesus should have known all about dirt. Simon “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.’” The word translated here as “sort” actually means “soil.” Simon thought Jesus should have known what soil she came from, what dirt she came from, what filthy lifestyle she had been living. Had been? Hah! Once a soiled dove, always a soiled dove.

Now, Simon did not say this out loud. Let Jesus and this woman be accused of indiscretion. They deserve it. But Simon discreetly kept his opinions to himself. He only said these things to himself.

Yet, Jesus did not overlook it. Though it was only to himself, Simon was wrongly judging Jesus and the woman. And Simon knew it, and he did it anyway. These are the kinds of thoughts of the heart that bear the fruit of wrong actions and hurtful words.

We may not understand it, but Simon knew why this woman did what she did. She kissed Jesus’ feet, because Simon had not greeted Jesus at the door with a kiss, as customary as a handshake or a hug is today. She washed Jesus’ dirty feet, because Simon had not hospitably offered Jesus a basin of water in which to wash the road grime from His feet. Simon even knew why she was weeping and using her tears to wash Jesus’ feet... because Simon had intentionally withheld these customary ways of expressing greeting and welcome for an honored guest. Simon did not think of Jesus as an honored prophet in his home but as a wannabe to be examined up close, and perhaps even to be humiliated through theological debate. Simon knew why she had come to his house, bearing an alabaster flask of expensive ointment and seeking Jesus. He knew that she had already heard Jesus preach that God forgives every kind of sin and washes people clean and makes them new, and that preaching had changed her. She’d left behind prostitution, and out of gratitude, she had a thank offering to give to God. Only, because she believed that Jesus was more than a prophet, she brought the offering to Him instead of to the Temple. Jesus let her, because He was more than a prophet. To see Jesus treated so shamefully, that’s what made her weep.

Simon knew all of this. He knew better. And still he judged her and Jesus, in his heart, in what he said to himself.

Think of the things we tell ourselves. "Her kind doesn't like to work. They're lazy." "Oh, they're just a bunch of racists." "Look at what he's wearing. He's probably a terrorist." "I don't know if I should trust him. He used to have a substance abuse problem." And these examples don't include the judgmental things we think about our own loved ones. And when a person we judged proves to be different than how we judged him, think of the things we tell ourselves to justify our judgmental thinking.

It's like when you discover that an item you recently purchased went on sale a couple of days later at a different store. You tell yourself, "Well, the cost of driving over there would have been more than I would have saved. The sales people and the clerks at that other store are not as helpful." See how we are. The things we tell ourselves. To make ourselves feel better, to feel superior, to feel less dirty than everyone else. But dirt is dirt. We've all got dirt no matter where we came from. Jesus does not see one person as dirtier or less dirty than another. According to the parable that He tells Simon, He sees all of us equal. Equally unable to pay the debt we owe God for the good we have not done.

His blood is able to bleach away the stains left by any amount of dirt. The dirty feet this woman washed would be nailed to a cross and Jesus' tears and sweat and lifeblood would be given to wash our sins. His lifeblood pays whatever debt we owe to God. That's what Jesus was saying to Simon in this parable. Simon judged Jesus as just another Messiah wannabe, but God did not judge Simon as being the typical Pharisee. So, He went to Simon's house. And after being humiliated at the door, God didn't get all huffy and walk out. He still didn't judge Simon as the being the typical Pharisee. He stayed. Jesus accepted Simon's humiliation, the humiliation that would eventually grow into the humiliation He'd suffer on the cross. Jesus accepted humiliation in order to win forgiveness for Simon's sins and our sins of arrogance and meanness and judgmental thinking. In order to be able to indicate to Simon and us through the parable that all is forgiven, all our debt is paid, everything that the woman did for Jesus that Simon did not do for Him was forgiven.

That being freed of his debt, Simon would be free to confess how large the debt had been. How judgmental his thinking had been. That's where purified thinking begins. It begins with confession. With recognizing our judgmental, impure, and critical thoughts before they have the chance to make it to our tongues and our actions. Through Jesus' blood, through forgiveness of these sins, God leads us to confess our soiledness, as this woman did. Our hearts are of great importance to God, and He can change the thinking of our hearts. He can give us clean hearts as surely as He changed this woman who had been soiled. God can purify our judgmental thinking just as the woman washed Jesus' feet.

Amen