

# Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

## SINNER AND SAINT

Luke 7:36-8:3

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### Analysis by Peter Keyel

36 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. 37 And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. 38 She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." 40 Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "Speak." 41 "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing 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 were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown

great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” 48 Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 But those who were at the 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.”

(Luke 8) Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2 as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Sin Is What a Sinner Does**

### **Step 1 Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Sin***

We don’t know what the unnamed woman’s sins are, though we know both that her sins are “many,” and that Simon the Pharisee easily recognizes her as a sinner. We do get a sense of some of sins other women bore: evil spirits, infirmities and membership in Herod’s household. Traditionally, we tend to assume she was sexually promiscuous and/or otherwise overtly not a good, clean Jewish woman. If nothing else, Simon the Pharisee might know this woman as a sinner simply because she crashed his dinner party to bother the guest of honor. Regardless, there’s no question that this woman has sinned.

### **Step 2 Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Sinner***

Although this woman’s outward actions—her sins—matter in that they have caused damage to her and those around her, the specifics of her sins are not the important focus. Simon diagnoses this woman as a sinner—even if she somehow fixed her earlier sins, she will go on sinning. Werner Elert sums up this

diagnosis well: “Sin is what a sinner does.” What’s worse is that even the woman is aware of her problem: face to face with Jesus, she cannot help but cry, knowing she is a sinner and cannot change her heart.

### **Step 3 Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Damned***

The woman’s tears cannot save her. Simon the Pharisee shows hospitality in not throwing her out, but there’s no question in anyone’s mind: this woman is a sinner and will always be such. Even a last ditch effort to save herself by anointing a prophet and washing his feet won’t earn her forgiveness. She knows from both her community and from her conscience that she is a sinner, and that sinners deserve hell. Not only does she live with the consequences of her sins daily, but she knows what God’s justice is for her: damnation. She’s trapped in a living hell until she dies and goes down to the eternal hell.

## **PROGNOSIS: Salvation Is What Jesus Does**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Saved***

God is doing something new with sinners, however. Instead of justly condemning her to hell for her sins, Jesus lifts her up from her living hell. This is but one example of what God is doing in Jesus, as Jesus will go further to die on the cross and go all the way down into that eternal hell in his mission to rescue sinners. God’s approval of this mission is evident in the resurrection of Jesus in the face of sin, death and hell. Jesus has overcome the power of hell!

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Saint***

Breaking the power of hell over this woman produces immediate effects. The life-giving faith that has saved this woman also sends her in peace. Jesus’ parable illustrates what change has happened in this woman’s life: she is now filled with gratitude and her heart has been changed by the forgiveness. She came in as a sinner, but leaves as a saint.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Forgiveness***

Jesus uses this woman's story to help another sinner: Simon the Pharisee. Instead of treating the woman with the contempt due for her sins, Jesus raises her—the greater sinner—up as an example to Simon and the others. The tangible aspect of this example is the forgiveness at work right at Simon's table—not Simon's toleration of a sinner, but the proclamation of a message that has the power to reconcile to God, change hearts and make saints out of sinners, who are free to be sent out with God's peace. We know other women in the Bible with similar stories (see 8:2-3) who went out, told their stories of encountering Christ, provided for the apostles, and proclaimed the Kingdom of God.