

Third Sunday after Pentecost

SAVING FAITH

Luke 7:36-8:3

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

36One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. 37And 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. 38She 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. 39Now 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." 40Jesus 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. 42When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" 43Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44Then 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. 45You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47Therefore, 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.” 48Then he said to her, “your sins are forgiven.” 49But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” 8:1Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

DIAGNOSIS: Skeptical about Jesus

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Skeptical and Loveless*

Simon the Pharisee is curious, but only mildly impressed with Jesus. He’s probably heard rumors that Jesus is a prophet (v. 39). In any case, he’s curious enough to invite Jesus to dinner, but stops short of going “all out” to welcome him. He doesn’t seem to see anything extra-special about Jesus that would warrant an extravagant show of hospitality, any extraordinary act of love: he doesn’t offer Jesus any water to wash his feet, he doesn’t greet him with a kiss, he offers no oil for anointing (vv. 45-46). When the “sinful woman” barges in and interrupts dinner, Simon is scandalized. She weeps, she bows adoringly, she kisses, she effusively anoints Jesus with her tears and expensive oil (vv. 37, 38), exactly the opposite of Simon’s reserved hospitality. Secretly skeptical, Simon thinks, Here’s my test: If Jesus is a prophet, he’ll know that this woman is a sinner.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Skeptical and Unrecognizing*

Not only does Jesus know the status of the woman, that “her sins are many,” he also knows what Simon is thinking (vv. 40 & 47)! And still Simon remains skeptical. He and his guests charily mumble, “Who is this who even forgives sins” (v. 49), as in, Who does he think he is? In stark contrast to the sinful woman, they don’t recognize Jesus as the promised messiah, as God’s mercy-just-walked-through-the-door, the one who brings in the reign of God. Instead, they’re blinded by their own so-called “goodness” (as in, self-righteousness). Because they operate by the Law, they measure righteousness in terms of degrees of sinfulness, rather than in terms of trusting God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Skeptics Left Behind*

Knowing what Simon is thinking, Jesus tells a little parable about a creditor with two debtors-one with a big debt, the other with a little debt (vv. 41-42). Simon thinks he has “little debt,” maybe he thinks it’s even negligible. However, no matter the degree of indebtedness, ALL stand as debtors before God. Simon has forgotten the Promises, so he fails to recognize mercy when he [Jesus] walks in the door, and so sadly, Simon will get no mercy.

PROGNOSIS: Trusting Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Kingdom’s Arrival*

This remarkable “sinful woman” recognized in Jesus God delivering on his promises of mercy and forgiveness. In return, Jesus, speaking for/as God, tells her, “Your sins are forgiven” (v. 49). He can do so because he knows he is the source of that forgiveness. He knows he is the Messiah. After he travels about the country “proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God,” he ends up in Jerusalem, nailed to a cross,

with the sins of the world loaded on his shoulders. But as he declares tetelistei, "it is finished," the debt is paid, all debts, large and small, for Pharisees too, are paid up.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Saving Faith*

The deciding attribute that distinguished the woman from Simon is that she trusted Jesus to deliver God's mercy to her while Simon did not. Jesus calls her trust "faith" and tells her, "Your faith has saved you" (v. 50). Her faith, because it was in Jesus, saved her. When our faith is likewise in Jesus, we hear the same words: "Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you" (vv. 48 & 49).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Over-flowing Love*

After this episode, Jesus continues to travel "through cities and villages," with an entourage that included the twelve disciples and many women, whom, Luke makes a point of telling us, have been cured of evil spirits and infirmities (8:1-3). They too, had been "forgiven much" and they too respond to that forgiveness just as this woman did. Their response is to generously "provide for them [the entourage] out of their resources" (8:3). Generosity comes from "loving much," which comes from being forgiven much.