

# Walking Through Luke— Debt Forgiven

Luke 7:36-50

Emma Shoemaker & Jacqueline Laybourn ~ March 19, 2017 ~ Youth Sunday

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**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 7:36-50, NRSV)

Emma Shoemaker – *the woman*

You matter. You have a purpose in this life. Over the past four years I have attended Faith, I have been welcomed and accepted by many beautiful faces and stories. I know some of you better than others, some I only know by face. However, if you zone out for the rest of this message I want you to come out of this knowing that you matter and have a purpose because you are loved by the creator or the universe.

I am sure you have heard this before. Let it resonate. Soak it in. You have worth. How do I know this? How do I, an insecure 17 year old young woman have any proof of this? I definitely do not contain all the answers. At least I do not have any answers from my own power. All I know is that Jesus never failed to love the most unexpected people. Which does in fact include all of us, all sinners in a room, desperate to be known and loved. It includes all our neighbors. That one raggedy person you saw on the side of the road earlier today, the political member on TV that you would gladly throw your shoe at, the teenagers yelling and screaming to music at the top of their lungs and going 15 over the speed limit. The creator loves all of them and thinks their lives are beautiful.

The woman described in Luke does not receive a name in any of the gospels except for "sinner." For women at the time were not seen as valuable outside the home for the most part. Her past is unknown, as are her indiscretions and her chains. All we know is something about her past compelled her to take up an action so atrocious in society's eyes as pour expensive oil over this all powerful man they knew as the messiah. All we know is some beautiful transformation occurred within her soul. This act of service had enough meaning to society for three men, that most likely viewed themselves as superior to the woman, to make accounts of it in the gospel. It must have been overwhelming for her to give all she had to him.

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Scholars have estimated that the oil she bestowed upon Jesus was equal to a year's worth of earnings. Her mindset was so moved as to use all of it on this one mysterious man. A man that showed a sinner like her, one who felt most undeserving, unconditional love and grace. The woman wept at his feet. Tears accumulated from previous pain and guilt. Also, tears of joy. Tears of relief that this man saw worth in her. She cried at the very feet of Jesus Christ, making herself vulnerable for him to see all that she was.

I find it compelling that the woman then proceeded to wipe her tears with her hair. In 1 Corinthians 11:15 Paul describes the women's hair as "a glory to her." A women's hair was a symbol of her pride. Her pride that she was willing to let go of completely to be accepted for who she truly was.

I know what it is like to feel broken. Even at 17, I know what it means to be lost and have no idea where to turn next. We would be lying to ourselves if we claimed to have never felt tied down by guilt and the weight of sin and the world. The condemnation that we place on ourselves is not an easy circumstance to shake off. It can be an arduous, wearisome task to free yourself from brokenness and guilt. It's driving through a foggy highway at 12am with the only sound being the muffled radio. However, if you know that this God of the world loves you regardless, you will find this process a lot more freeing. You will begin to hear a voice in that lonely, silent drive and start to feel God guiding you through the fog. He can make music within the silence. Because in the grand scheme of our lives, Jesus is the only one that can truly save us from inevitable shame.

In the world we live in today it is all too easy to define my worth and identity in idols, even if these idols are good. To find some ideal that makes us feel like we matter. In the noisy halls of high school, I often subconsciously find myself attempting to define who I am by the clothes I wear, by who my friends are, by my times in track, by my grades, by my future plans, by attempting to please people. This is not who I am. I am God's beloved. We are known and have a purpose beyond the people and plans we place our worth in.

The woman is an admirable example of what it means to lay down everything for Jesus. She placed her past behind her, ignored the judgmental whispers of society, like the men surrounding her assuming their superiority, and gave all her worth to Jesus.

Let us do our best to recognize our importance within our souls. To find our identity with Jesus Christ. After we claim this within ourselves let us do our best to spread this message of pure joy and grace. Imagine if we told one person every day that they are beautiful and have worth instead of condemning them. Imagine if Christians were known for their love and acceptance, instead of our hate towards specific groups of people and individuals we do not deem worthy enough. Let us humble ourselves and come to the feet of Jesus.

Amen.

### Jacqueline Laybourn – *the Pharisee*

I wanted to start out with refreshing your memory on what a Pharisee exactly is. When I typed it into Google the definition that popped up was "a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law, and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity" then below it, it said "a self-righteous person; a hypocrite." The word in Aramaic simply means "separated ones." They were a mixture of a social, political, & a religious movement. Sound familiar? Well, I'm not going to go into how & why they became foundational to Rabbinic Judaism because that would make a completely different & arguably more boring sermon.

I want to focus on the Pharisee & how we are all much more like him than we realize. Let that sink in. As you were listening today you probably were thinking "Huh, good thing I'm not like that dummy," well I hate to break it to you but we kinda are that dummy. I'll start by calling myself out. You all remember 2016 right? How it felt like one loooooong Friday the 13th? Whether you are left or right it was like living in an Orwell novel. For me what stuck out the most was the various conservative Christian movements. The ones that openly damned the LGBT+ community, various minority ethnic groups, rights such as abortion, & many other things. I remember this was right around when I started to openly talk about being a Christian. No one ever asked me how I felt about these political issues as a Christian, but I felt obligated to make it perfectly clear that I was not one of those Christians. For the most part that is true. I believe I am called by God to love all of his creation. Whether they are gay, Muslim, Mexican, or a combination of the three. I am to love them like family, & I am to do so without judgment. I pride myself in being good at this around 80% of the time.

None of my friends are 100% like me racially, ethnically, religiously, or socially. To me they are beautiful because we are God's creation together. I fight for the underdog & I actively call people out for their prejudice comments.

So here's the other 20%. I find it aggravatingly hard to love without judgment my Christian brothers & sisters from the conservative movements I previously mentioned. I find it hard because in my eyes they aren't doing it "right." Despite us both being followers of Jesus Christ, I still see them as "others." I would be lying to you if I didn't tell you that in actuality I think I am better than them. I have a better understanding of the teachings of Jesus, right? I live more truly to God, right? They are the self-righteous for damning those people, right?

This is how I am like the Pharisee. I have spent years believing I am better than people because I am somehow righteously above them, & this is how I am hypocritical. God calls us to love all of His creation, not only some of his creation. Me denying them access to this part of my identity subsequently identifies them as dissimilar from me. I am called to love them without reservation.

This passage calls for us to listen. Not just to Jesus & the lessons he has for us, but for us to listen to the lessons we can gather from those around us. The Pharisee obviously didn't know this, & it resulted in him making unfair judgments. If the Pharisee had heard what life she led & what it took her to be inspired to anoint Jesus, maybe he would see how similar they were. No one follows Jesus, or any religion, because they are perfect. If the world worked that way I doubt religion would even matter to most of us. Christians are Christians because, well to be frank, we're sinners. Whether it is "ordinary" things such as being lazy or being gluttonous, or something more extreme as adultery or murder, we are sinners. Despite this, under God we are equal. We are equally loved & equally receive mercy. When we fail to see this beautiful promise of equity, we fail Jesus. In this passage he says to the Pharisee, "She has done for me what you all failed to do. She has done a beautiful thing." The woman fully saw the vision Jesus had for her. She saw the promise of forgiveness & mercy for the life she was leaving. The Pharisee was neglecting to even see what Jesus had to offer him.

When we choose to do all of this we choose to live like the Pharisee. We begin to choose letting our own limitations & insecurities guide our life. It piles

up too. It becomes a pretty hefty burden to carry when we choose to live these types of lives.

Now that you feel guilty for judging all the time, I'd like to lighten it up a bit. Let this passage serve as a reminder that although we may judge those around us God does not. He sees us as whole people. He knows what is in our heart. He hopes that we will choose to lead lives of love, understanding, & forgiveness just like Jesus did. This choice isn't always the easiest, especially in the world we live in today, but we must remember that it is the life we are meant to live.

Amen.

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## The Next Step

### A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. How were you encouraged by the youth as they led us in worship? How were you challenged?
2. In our call to fulfill our community promises to raise our children, are there ways you would like to be more engaged with the youth and children of our church, either directly or indirectly?
3. Read Luke 7:36-50 once again. What stands out to you in this passage?
4. How many different perspectives are represented in this passage, and what is the message to each of these people?
5. Emma spoke from the perspective of the woman. When in your life have you most experienced purpose, that you truly *matter*? When has it been more difficult?
6. Do you think Jesus' treatment of this woman changed anyone's mind about her? Do you think it changed her own mind about herself? How should our own perspectives be challenged or transformed?
7. Jacqueline spoke from the perspective of the Pharisee who had labeled this woman a "sinner." Can you name a group of people or a person that you have labeled unfairly, or forgotten to view as "beloved children of God"?

8. How can Jesus' example of kindness and grace toward this woman soften rather than harden our hearts toward others?

**Table to Table Question**

*A question for kids and adults to answer together*

What was crazy about what the woman did for Jesus?

If you met Jesus face to face,  
what crazy thing might YOU do?