

## A Generous Heart

By

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The text for today's sermon, meditation is the gospel lesson that we heard a little while ago. I'll read a few verses from today's gospel:

Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

41"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with

her hair. 45You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

48Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

49The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

At our house we like to host parties, especially barbeques. We like to host friends, relatives, schoolmates, or business associates. Like most people we like to be around people who like us. It makes us feel good. Sometimes we have special people to the house. Perhaps it's a relative from overseas or someone we just met whose new to the area. It's a time for special preparations and a time to open the doors and make them feel special. Everything has to be perfect. We want to make a good impression. Once the guests arrive, the comfort level rises, the nervousness of the preparation goes away and the party begins. It all works out well.

Now have you ever been at a party or a situation where you feel a little setup or just a bit uncomfortable? Maybe you get the feeling that the reason that you've been invited to the person's party was more because of what you could do for the host than who you were. Was this the reason why one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him? I have a feeling it was more for the bragging rights of having had Jesus at his house than having his sins forgiven and his heart made right with God.

Enter the party crasher. We've had guests bring other people to our parties and that's fine. There's always food and a warm welcome. Verse 37 tells us of a woman who lived a sinful life. We don't know what her sins were, but you can be sure she didn't have a great reputation and was not on the "A-List" for this party. It doesn't matter what her sins were. Her sins are our sins. Nonetheless she hears that Jesus is at this dinner event and decides she needs His forgiveness. I can hear her thoughts. "I have to go. I don't care that I wasn't invited. I don't care what I've done. I'm going. I'll bring something. That will make it better".

The woman brings an alabaster jar of perfume. Alabaster is a beautiful, usually white mineral known as Calcite. It has been mined since ancient times in Egypt. Perfumes were used in ancient times for a variety of reasons. One was as an emollient to help protect the skin from the torrid desert sun. Another reason was to smell nice as we use perfumes today. A third reason was to help in the embalming process. It is very interesting to me that this woman chose a pure colored jar as Jesus is pure and brings perfume as will be used in His burial and entombment following His crucifixion.

We next see in verse 38 that the woman stands behind Jesus at his feet and begins weeping. She knew that she needed Jesus' forgiveness and salvation. Nothing would stop her. Once she heard that Jesus was at a dinner in town, she knew she had to make it inside that house. She brought a gift. Now having made it to the table and in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, she breaks down and starts crying. The tears from her eyes fall onto Jesus' feet. She kneels and wipes the tears from Jesus' feet with her hair. She kisses His feet. She pours perfume on them. She knew her sins were forgiven and that feeling overwhelmed her. It should overwhelm us also.

Now we hear from the host, the Pharisee, in verse 39. The Pharisee says to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." Well, that's not that unusual considering all of us are sinners. This guy, the Pharisee, has a really high opinion of himself as you may have been able to tell. You might expect that, considering that the word Pharisee comes from the Hebrew word for "separated", meaning someone separated for a life of purity. Is this Pharisee leading a "Life of Purity" compared to Jesus? No, absolutely not. He's showing a less than generous heart as host of the event. All he can see is that this "woman" has crashed the party and is touching his guest of honor. Instead of seeing an act of faith by this woman, the self centered Pharisee takes over and he can only complain. Not only does he complain, but he doubts the fact that Jesus is a prophet because he's allowing the woman to be near Him.

Jesus knows our every thought. He hears what the Pharisee is thinking and challenges him. In Verse 40, Jesus says "Simon, I have something to tell you." And the Pharisee asks Jesus to tell him. Jesus says in Verse 41, "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

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Jesus' point here is that God's grace is generous. His love for us is generous. The generous heart shown through the abundant forgiveness of the debts, the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ's death on the cross on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday is used to draw us closer to God. The Pharisee didn't have a generous heart. The Pharisee only thought about an unwanted woman touching the Lord Jesus Christ in his house. He wasn't concerned about the comfort of his honored guest, either. He didn't take the time to make Jesus comfortable on arrival. It was the tradition to wash a person's feet to remove the dust of travel and make them feel better. Yet it was the tears of the woman that washed Jesus' feet. The Pharisee gave no kiss of greeting, yet the woman kissed Jesus' feet. The Pharisee put no oil on Jesus' head, yet the woman poured perfume on His feet. Who had the generous heart? Jesus challenges the heart of the Pharisee in Verse 47 "I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven for she loved much. He who has forgiven little loves little. Then Jesus gave the ultimate comfort in verse 48. "Your sins are forgiven." These four words

give us the peace of mind we so long for on earth. Because of our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and not through our good deeds or works, we are forgiven. Heaven is our generous reward for this faith.

And now may the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserve you and keep you unto life everlasting. Amen.

Lord, God, our heavenly father. We ask that you instill in us a generous heart. Give us the opportunity to show hospitality, generosity, and kindness to those we know and those whose paths we cross, if only for a moment. Have our generosity and kindness show all people the love that you have for us. A love so deep that you gave your only son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for all of our sins, past, present, and future.

At this time of year we remember the teachers, administrators, and students who have completed their year of schooling. Bless them that their knowledge can grow not only in the subjects that were studied in their courses, but in your holy word. Bless those in our Sunday School and in the Vacation Bible School that their teaching of the love that Jesus has for all of us may touch the hearts of those enrolled and grow a loving faith throughout their life. Amen.

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