

June 20, 2010
Pentecost 4

"Tears of Joy Flow from Jesus' Forgiveness"

LUKE 7:37-50

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. ³⁹ When 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." ⁴⁰ Jesus 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. 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." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. ⁴⁴ Then 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. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Why do people shed tears? Here is one reason for shedding tears. Cut open this onion. Chop it up and you may find your eyes filling with tears. If a bug lands in your eyes, you will shed tears to wash out the bug.

We shed tears when we are happy. We shed tears when we are sad. When I danced with my daughter at her recent wedding, there were tears in her eyes, tears of joy. When Susan's father passed away she shed tears, tears of sorrow for losing her dad, but tears of joy that he is now with Jesus. If you are lachrymose, that means prone to shedding tears, you may need a tissue when you see a movie or hear a story that touches you deeply.

So what about this woman who came to see Jesus? Why did she shed so many tears? From what Jesus says about her, her tears were tears of joy because she knew that she was forgiven and that Jesus loved her even though she had done terrible things in her life.

Look at the tears

Let's take a close look at this woman who comes to Jesus with tears streaming down her face. "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.." The woman who came to see

Jesus was a sinful woman. She was known throughout the town as "that woman." Did she cheat and steal from people? Did she break up marriages with her immoral life? We aren't given the sordid details of her life, but you can be sure mothers warned their daughters not to turn out like that woman.

This woman wanted to see Jesus. She risks going to the home of a Pharisee named Simon. The Pharisees were known as the super religious people who worked hard to keep the laws of the Old Testament, and worked even harder to keep extra rules and regulations set down by the generations of Jewish rabbis. I read this past week that they would not even eat an egg that had been laid by a hen if it were laid on the Sabbath day. Imagine how much they delighted in talking about this woman because it made them feel so superior. Imagine how they must have looked at her when she walked into the room to see Jesus and interrupted their meal. In those days, they reclined at a low table, leaning on cushions with their left arm and eating with their right arm, their feet stretched out behind them.

This woman brings with her an alabaster jar of perfume to anoint the body of Jesus. In the 23rd Psalm we hear about this anointing with perfume that takes place at a meal. "Thou anointest my head with oil and my cup runneth over." Such alabaster jars of perfume could be very costly. You will recall when Mary from Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus the perfume was worth 8 months of wages, in our money about \$30,000 dollars. When you know what Jesus has done to forgive you and give you peace with God and a home in heaven, you always want to bring your best to him, whatever it may cost you personally.

So here she comes into the room. She stands at Jesus' feet as he is reclining at the table. The room is silent as the men wonder to themselves why she is there. They hear her weeping. They see the flood of copious tears stream down her face and fall on Jesus' feet. They watch as she kneels down and wipes the tears off his feet with the hair from her head. And then the smell of the perfume fills the room, providing even more testimony to her love for Jesus.

Jesus knew what the owner of the house was thinking at this moment because he is God and he is able to see into the hearts of people. Psalm 139 says that the Lord knows when we sit and when we stand, he is thoroughly acquainted with all our ways. "When the Pharisee 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.'" People often convey their feelings by their body language. Have you ever felt someone looking at you in a way that says, "I don't like you?" That's how this man looked at this woman and how he looked at Jesus for not condemning her and throwing her out of the room. Self righteous people love to look down on people who they think are not as good as they are. Remember the man who prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evil-doers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." This man named Simon despised Jesus for the forgiveness he offered to this woman.

I recall sharing the message of the gospel with a man from Iran named Ahmad. He had read the Bible through several times, so he claimed. He then proclaimed rather forcefully that he would have nothing to do with a religion that had Jesus turning to the thief on the cross and offering him Paradise, without demanding he do something to pay for what he had done.

wrong. Our sinful human nature wants to always sing with old crooner, "I'll do it my way." How will Jesus respond to what he sees in this man's heart? How will he respond to the woman who has washed his feet with her tears and put perfume on them? Our Jesus reaches out to both sinners in love.

Listen to Jesus' explanation for the tears

Jesus tells this Pharisee the reason for this woman's tears. They were not tears of sorrow and pain that flowed to gain forgiveness; they were tears of joy that celebrated forgiveness given to her as a free gift. Jesus tells a story about two people who owed money to a creditor. One owed 500 denarii or about \$50,000 and the other owed 50 denarii or about \$5000. The debt was cancelled for both of them. Jesus asks the obvious question, "Who appreciated this more?" You don't need an advanced degree in accounting to figure out this one. Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled." You see dear Christian the appreciation for how Jesus cancelled your debt of sin depends on how large you see your debt to be. If I measure my life by how some people live their lives, I can feel pretty good about myself. If I measure my life according to what God asks of me in the Bible, then I realize how far short I fall of God's glory and how large my debt is.

Oh look at Jesus, our loving Lord and Savior, reaching out to evil Simon to show him that he needed his debt cancelled just as this woman did. Jesus asks him, "Do you see this woman?" Look at this woman whom you despise, this awful woman with the checkered past, this nasty woman who has defiled your clean house. Look at her Simon, please look at her. "I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and dried my tears with her hair." It was common courtesy in those days to offer someone water to wash their dusty feet before you sat down to a meal. Simon didn't offer Jesus a kiss as was the custom in those days for welcoming a guest in your home. She kissed Jesus' feet. Simon did not put perfumed oil on Jesus head as was the custom for a meal. She poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. I think of the words from Romans 2 that tell us, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."

The more I see of that oil spill in the Gulf States, the more I think of how that illustrates the debt of sin that every person cannot pay no matter how hard they try. Beneath the ocean floor, is a large pool of oil under great pressure. When it is tapped it flows profusely just as "Old Maud" did here in Orcutt over 100 years ago. Tap into your sinful human nature and don't be surprised at the sin that comes out in the form of bad thoughts and bad words and bad things you do. As Paul said, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature." Once the sin we commit against an infinite God manifests itself in our lives, it becomes infinite. It cannot be contained and capsulated, controlled and removed. The Pharisees who avoided eating eggs laid on the Sabbath because the hen did too much work pushing the egg out of its body could not by their religious works remove one toxic sin from their lives.

The millions of gallons of oil that have spilled in the Gulf will never be fully removed. Only God could do that by a miracle. Our sin is even more wide spread and certainly more toxic. It cannot be removed. The sinful woman loved Jesus. Her tears flowed profusely because she believed with all her heart that Jesus had forgiven her. He was the Messiah

who would shed his blood for her and for the whole world so that we can confidently say this morning, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin."

Jesus explains this strange action of the woman who was crying and shedding tears and wiping his feet with her hair and pouring perfume on his feet. This was not done to earn forgiveness. It was done because she appreciated how much she had been forgiven. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." She loved much because her many sins had been forgiven.

This woman came into the room to say thank you to Jesus, but before she left, Jesus assured her once again that she was forgiven. "Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace." She needed to hear Jesus say that to her once more. We never grow weary and tired of being assured of that peace and that forgiveness we have in Jesus. Jesus lets us come to his special meal, Holy Communion, to receive his body and blood with assurance of pardon and peace so we can go home saying joyfully, "I am forgiven." That message brings tears of joy to our eyes. Amen.