

*“Forgiven? Love!”*

Our Scripture today is extraordinarily powerful! However, its message is often in the eye of the beholder or ear of the hearer. Some folks, who tend to be more legalistic, have attempted to claim the Reading requires each individual to show love in order to earn forgiveness. Some have focused on the lack of hospitality shown toward Jesus by the host of the meal, Simon. In this sermon, **I argue Jesus’ message is something quite different – it is that he revealed the woman was forgiven because everyone is offered God’s forgiveness. Her abundant agape love demonstrated she trusted Jesus’ message and experienced being forgiven.** Unfortunately, Luke was not an eyewitness, so he is dependent on someone else – his source to describe what took place during the event in today’s Scripture. Most reports Luke, Matthew, and Mark have received from their sources are very sparse in their descriptions – the details are limited, so it is extremely important for us, as we study the Reading, to pay particular attention to the dynamics between Jesus and the other main participants in the scene.

Let me set the scene. Jesus was invited to dinner in the home of a Pharisee – one of the legalists of Jewish society. The Pharisees were major players in opposition to Jesus. We don’t know why Simon invited Jesus to his home. We know from what Jesus later said to Simon, the host failed to show Jesus normal hospitality. For example, they wore sandals with no socks and the roads were made of dirt. So, when a guest first arrived in someone’s home, the host would facilitate the washing of the guest’s feet. Simon did not do that for Jesus! **Providing one’s guest with hospitality was part of the Jewish Law, yet the legalist, Simon, failed to fulfill that requirement.**

The other person, who was a major participant in this event, was an unnamed woman, who was not a relative of Jesus nor of Simon. If such a woman touched either one of them, then they would be made religiously unclean for a period of time. A good Jewish man would not know if the woman was religiously unclean, such as having a flow of blood, so a man had to assume the woman was unclean, if she was not a relative – someone the man could verify was religiously clean. Luke said the woman was a sinner at the very start of the Scripture. Since Luke was not an eye witness – didn’t even know the woman, it is safe to assume he concluded she was a sinner because of the reported thoughts of Simon. **This mystery woman not only touched Jesus but did so in both an extravagant and agape loving fashion.** She showed up at Simon’s house because she learned Jesus was there. Obviously, she went because she knew Jesus had a major impact upon her. She may have heard him teach or preach. She may have witnessed him healing someone – maybe herself or a loved one. Whatever reason, she came to demonstrate to Jesus her gratitude in an agape loving fashion! She knew Simon and his Pharisee legalist friends would disapprove of her presence and actions. Nevertheless, the woman personally and abundantly provided Jesus with the hospitality that Simon failed to give to his guest!

**Then, in verse 39 Luke tells us, “When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man really were a prophet, he would know who this woman is who is touching him; he would know what kind of sinful life she lives!’”** It is clear from Simon’s words that he was judging both the woman and Jesus! He thought of the woman as a sinner. The host concluded that Jesus was not a prophet – not sent by God because he allowed this sinner to touch him. Let’s stop here for a moment. Somehow, Luke’s source for this event knew Simon’s thoughts! Further, the source implied Jesus knew the thoughts of his host.

Simon was judgmental toward Jesus and the woman in his thoughts, however, Jesus chose to confront his host’s views and behavior! **In verse 40, Luke stated, “Jesus spoke up and said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to tell you.’ ‘Yes, Teacher,’ he said, ‘tell me.’”** Since Jesus and we know what Simon was thinking, it is clear he was pretending or lying or sarcastic when he called Jesus, “Teacher”. So, Simon dug a deeper hole in his thoughts, words, and lack of action toward Jesus.

Jesus set about exposing Simon’s hypocritical sinning, when he responded by telling his host a story about two debtors and concluded in **verse 42, “Neither of them could pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Which one, then, will love him more?”** Simon was unaware his answer was aiding Jesus in exposing him as a sinner! **In verse 43, Luke reported, “‘I suppose,’ answered Simon, ‘that it would be the one who was forgiven more.’ ‘You are right,’ said Jesus.”**

Jesus began to bring his purpose for the story to a swift conclusion with a question in **verse 44, “Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your home, and you gave me no water for**

*my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.*” Jesus’ implied message was something like, “Simon, you failed to fulfill your hosting hospitality duties for me, your invited guest, while this woman, who you have judged and belittled in your thoughts is extravagantly fulfilling your hospitality responsibilities!”

**In verse 45, Jesus continued, “You did not welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came.”** As you may have noticed in news reports or movies, Middle Eastern hospitality practices include the host kissing the guests on the cheeks. So, again, Simon had failed to fulfill his hospitality tasks and the woman he degraded extravagantly fulfilled them!

**In verse 46, Jesus said, “You provided no olive oil for my head, but she has covered my feet with perfume.”** Simon provided no comfort for Jesus – no olive oil to anoint his head, while the “sinner” woman extravagantly poured an expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet!

**In verse 47a, Jesus stated, “I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven.”** With those words, Jesus informed Simon that the woman was already forgiven! Jesus did not say she was forgiven because she showed him great agape love. Instead, her agape love demonstrated her debt was forgiven. Remember, Jesus pointed to our already being forgiven by God as he taught his disciples to pray “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

When was the woman forgiven? Here is Jesus’ point, which Luke evidently missed. **Jesus was sent by the Divine Parent to inform everyone that God has forgiven us – released us of our debts to the Creator!** The woman had already recognized Jesus’ revelation and came to show her gratitude and agape love for revealing her forgiveness. Simon and his Pharisee buddies refused to comprehend Jesus’ message of God’s Agape Love and Forgiveness for us, so they did not respond with gratitude and agape love. They claimed they earned God’s love and forgiveness – they were extremely self-righteous – they did not believe they were unconditionally forgiven, so they did not respond to Jesus’ message with agape love!

**Jesus made that point when he concluded in verse 47b, “But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love.”** Simon and his Pharisee friends showed “little love” – he did, at least, invite Jesus to dinner in his home. So, the very group of people, who belittled and rejected others as sinners – debtors, did not perceive they had been forgiven because they did not see themselves as needing forgiveness. As Jesus clearly demonstrated, with the woman’s help, Simon had not fulfilled his hospitality responsibilities – he had missed the mark – sinned. One might hope Simon would have recognized Jesus was exposing his need of the forgiveness which Jesus was declaring God has given to everyone.

Confirming that Good News for the woman, Luke stated in **verse 48, “Then Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’”** Unfortunately, Simon and his legalist friends refused to understand what Jesus had demonstrated about God’s Forgiveness, so Luke reported in **verse 49, “The others sitting at the table began to say to themselves, ‘Who is this, who even forgives sins?’”** Jesus, the embodiment of God’s Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for us showed that agape love for the woman. Luke reported in **verse 50, “But Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”** The woman had trusted Jesus’ teachings about God’s Forgiveness and Agape Love for her and all people, so she was able to experience the forgiveness Jesus proclaimed. She was saved from the depression and despair of thinking God could never love her – never forgive her. She could, therefore, go in peace – shalom!

Trusting in God’s Agape Love and Forgiveness, which Jesus revealed and died to demonstrate to us, our faith in the Son of God leads us to trust the New Relationship with God which has been given to us along with the New Life in Christ. Let your great agape love be shown in your service to God through Round Grove United Church UCC and in your sharing God’s invitation with everyone – even those looked down upon. **Yes, you and I are to invite others to live out the forgiveness Jesus has revealed in the New Relationship we have with God and one another.** Amen.