

# “Lord, Have Mercy Upon Us”

Luke 7:36-8:3

Simon the Pharisee was obviously a person who had grown up with God’s Word. He was trained, as were all Pharisees, in the Torah – the Law of Moses. Also the Psalms and the writings of the prophets would have been as familiar to him as the reruns of MASH or Cheers or Seinfeld are for many of us – which is somewhat of an indictment of our society (and it is also really showing my age. Perhaps I should say they are as familiar as reruns of Duck Dynasty or Phineas and Ferb).

However, Simon was, as the prophet Isaiah said: “Ever seeing but never perceiving; ever hearing but never understanding.” Simon thought he knew God. He was convinced that he was a leading man within the kingdom of God. However, it is clear that he did not know God because he did not recognize who Jesus was. Simon questioned whether Jesus was even a true prophet because Jesus obviously did not recognize what kind of woman was washing His feet with her tears and anointing Him with perfume.

There is no doubt that prior to the events that took place that evening, Simon the Pharisee could quote Scripture better and went to worship more often than this sinful woman (who was most likely a prostitute. However, through the work of the Holy Spirit in her heart, the

sinful woman had a better understanding of repentance and forgiveness. She knew who she was in relation to God. The guilt of her sin and the realization that she needed Jesus literally brought her to her knees.

She never bowed before any of the self-righteous pillars of the community. Their laws seemed to be just rules taught by men. But she was humbled before the One Person who could save her.

The Pharisees, I am sure, repeatedly pointed out her sin – after all, they knew exactly who she was and what kind of life she had led. And they were right. It is not as if she didn't deserve to have her sins exposed. We all deserve to have our sins exposed. We all deserve shame and judgment. We deserve to have everything we have ever done wrong to be announced before God and all of our neighbors.

Forgiveness in Christ brings many blessings. Christ came to free you from guilt and shame. "Never let me be put to shame" is the plea of the Psalmist. This only happens in Christ. But this doesn't mean that our sins are to remain comfortably hidden. Confess you sin before God and receive His Absolution. When you sin against someone and it continues to bother your conscience, confess to them that what you have done is wrong. Then be received back better than ever – forgiven and strengthened in the Gospel.

The sinful woman confronted by the mere presence of Christ was made fully aware of her sin; it broke her defenses. The saying is true, "There cannot be faith in a heart that has not first been terrified."

The sinful woman felt the wrath of God; she feared the wrath of God.

Simon's problem was that he did not think that the wrath of God was of any concern to him. Like the Jews in Capernaum, which we heard about two weeks ago, who came to Jesus and asked Him to heal the Centurion's servant because "he was worthy" to have Jesus do this. Simon the Pharisee is quite confident that He is "worthy" of God's blessings.

The woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears comes to Him with a much more clear view of reality. She knew that she was a sinner. Simon knew that she was a sinner. But Simon didn't know that the same was true of himself.

How many of us are truly terrified, horrified, appalled at the things we do? at the things we say? Or do we just wink at our sins and tell ourselves it's no big deal? After all, everyone's a sinner, and I'm doing pretty good compared to that guy.

There is a reason that Christ spent so much of His ministry comparing and contrasting the attitude of the Pharisees with the desperate pleas of repentant people. The only times that Christ commends the faith of anyone He meets is when they say like the Samaritan woman: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner"; or like the Centurion who said: "I do not deserve for you to even come under the roof of my house"; or like the sinful woman in our Gospel lesson today who could say nothing, but was so overcome with remorse for how she had lived her life that she fell to her knees and with a tear-filled act of service and worship, bowed to her Lord and Savior.

This is how we are to approach the Lord. This is why the liturgy of all our worship services contain repeated heartfelt pleas for God's mercy and forgiveness. In the Kyrie, we sing: "Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ have mercy upon us; Lord have mercy upon us."

These words are not just filler so that our service lasts a full hour. They define our worship life. We come before God with sinful, heavy hearts and seek redemption the only way possible – we throw ourselves on the mercy of our Creator and Redeemer. We place our entire future in the faith that we have been saved through the blood of Christ. We come to worship; we come before Him with repentant hearts; and we know that just as He said to the sinful woman, so also Christ says to you today: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Amen.