

## Luke 7:36 – 8:3

<sup>36</sup> When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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." <sup>40</sup> Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. <sup>41</sup> "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. <sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. <sup>47</sup> Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." <sup>49</sup> The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup> and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; <sup>3</sup> Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Have you ever had one of those uncomfortable dinner table moments? Someone says or does something inappropriate or offensive or which upsets someone else.

Instantly the mood of the room changes.

Time slows down, and everyone wonders what will take place next.

In today's Gospel reading we are brought into the high drama of such a moment.

Simon is a Pharisee.

He is a respected figure in his community, someone who is known for his strong religious beliefs and good moral life.

Today he has invited Jesus to a banquet at his home.

Jesus has been making quite an impression and gaining quite a reputation, and Simon is keen to hear Jesus for himself

— and to be able to say that he once hosted him in his very own home.

Jesus enters Simon's home and the meal begins.

Conversation flourishes.

The noise level grows as the guests enjoy food and wine.

Simon is very pleased ... all is going very well.

That is ... until she arrives.

She has not been invited, she just turns up.

And at the very sight of her, Simon's blood pressure rises.

He knows who she is

... Nain is a small place where everyone knows everyone.

They've all heard the stories – what a disgrace!  
And now she he is here – in his own house of all places.

And as if that isn't enough, she throws herself down before his prized guest.

She begins to weep, and her tears pour down over his feet.

Opening a bottle of perfume – expensive perfume, perhaps equivalent to her whole life savings – she anoints his feet with its contents.

And then unbinding her hair, she wipes his feet, kissing them as she does.

All around watch in stunned silence.

What extraordinary behaviour, what disgusting behaviour.

Unless a servant girl, a woman shouldn't even be here, let alone touching a man with her hair!

Especially not this type of woman!

And why isn't Jesus refusing her attentions?

He seems to be accepting, even welcoming her behaviour!

How dare a rabbi let this happen in Simon's home!

Simon, we are told, says to himself *"If this man Jesus were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner."*

But Jesus is a prophet and more!

He knows the woman's heart ... and he also knows Simon's ... and not all is as it seems.

In Simon's heart there is self-righteous spiritual smugness and cutting condemnation.

He sees himself as superior to the woman in every way.

He thinks of himself as a man of God and of the woman as lost and godless.

And while he entertains Jesus in his home, he has not truly received him.

Jesus later tells us that Simon's hospitality has been mixed.

He says 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. <sup>45</sup> You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.*

Simon's reception of Jesus has been cool at best.

He has invited Jesus to his home to check him out, perhaps even to use him to bolster his own social credentials, but not to let him into his life or his heart.

He finds Jesus interesting but does not recognise that he might need him as Lord and Savior.

In labelling the woman as a sinner, Simon implies that he is not.

He thinks himself right with God.

There is nothing he believes he needs to receive from Jesus.

The woman, on the other hand, comes to Jesus with a heart full of gratitude.

She has no pretensions about herself.

She would have agreed with Simon's description of her as a sinner, but in Jesus she knew herself to be a forgiven sinner, saved for eternity.

It was a Jewish custom that if somebody saved your life, you would come to that person and kiss his feet.

Jesus has changed this woman's life and she wants to illustrate her love for him.

To do so she is willing to go wherever necessary to honour him, serve him and worship him ... even if that means upsetting the sensibilities of others and creating some chaos.

To illustrate the difference between Simon and woman, Jesus tells a story about two debtors.

One owes ten times more than the others, but both debts are graciously cancelled by the moneylender.

Jesus asks "*which of them will love him more?*"

Simon answers: "*I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.*"

Jesus then says of the woman: "*Her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.*"

There is a challenge for each of us in this story.

It is this: Whom are we more like?

Are we more like Simon the Pharisee, who basically magnifies the faults of others?

Do you magnify the faults of your husband or wife, your son or daughter, your in-laws, that certain person at work or in the church with whom you disagree?

Do you look across the congregation and see a room full of hypocrites ... bar one?

Are you driven more by a concern for theological or religious correctness or compassion and love for others?

Is there arrogance in your heart that means you magnify the faults of others and minimize your own?

Is that who you are?

Down deep in your heart, are you judgmental of other people and smug about your own goodness?

Or are you and I like this woman who knows her sinfulness and comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, I have these problems inside, this sinfulness.

Would you please forgive me, though I can't possibly deserve it?

Would you please touch me with your love and change me?."

This woman had a worshipful appreciation for Jesus because she knew both the extent of her own and sin the amazing breadth and depth of God's grace – a grace that would stretch as far as two nail-pierced hands on a cross outside Jerusalem.

She was filled with outrageous, convention-breaking, ridicule-risking love because in Jesus God's inconceivable love had reached out to her and forgiven her, warts and all.

Now her heartfelt desire was to follow and serve him, whatever that might mean.

Jesus said "*whoever has been forgiven little loves little*".

A Christian is someone who has been forgiven not only partially, but completely.

It follows that big love and big compassion should characterise the Christian's life, as light proceeds from the sun.

Love does not earn God's forgiveness – that is a pure undeserved gift received in faith.

Love, is however, a sign or product of a grace-filled life.

A life filled with God's grace is a life that pulsates with the loving presence and power of the risen Jesus.

A heart that holds Jesus at arms-length, on the other hand, will be short on love and skimpy on compassion.

It will be full of self importance, rather than God's outrageous mercy for others.

Instead of celebrating God's grace to self and others, it will judge and divide people into the deserving and undeserving.

Instead of risking all to demonstrate love and gratitude to Christ, it will be focussed on rights and wrongs, rules and regulations, reputation and properness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ – in Him we have been forgiven much!

May we – individually and collectively – reflect God's extravagant kindness in our thoughts, words and actions toward others.