



Week Four: Encountering Jesus in our GRATITUDE

Luke 7: 36-50

Opening Question: In our story today, we will encounter a woman who lavishes Jesus with great love. What is one way (big or small), that someone has loved you well this week?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: Last week we talked about encountering Jesus in our doubt. What do you remember from that conversation? How might you talk about the role of doubt in a life of faith? Does Jesus seem to be disappointed or intimidated by our doubts?

Today's Passage: Today we meet Jesus at a dinner party and get to watch as he interacts with two very different people at the table. One of the central points of this story is the difference between these two- a woman described as a "sinner" and a Pharisee, who initiated the party and is a religious leader in the community. One of the backdrops for this story is the context of Middle Eastern hospitality, which would have been known by all the people attending the dinner. The Pharisee, as the host, would have been expected to extend several acts of welcome and hospitality to Jesus, which we learn does not happen. The lack of those gestures would have been shocking enough to the people gathered there, but the real surprise happens when the woman comes out of the shadows and initiates her own tender and gratitude-filled interaction with Jesus.

The scene in this story is sometimes wrongly misinterpreted as the woman approaching Jesus and *seeking* forgiveness. But the tense that Jesus uses to speak about her really matters in this story. He tells Simon, "Her many sins **have been** forgiven because she **has loved** much" (vs 47), indicating that she is not in this room because she is seeking forgiveness, but because she is overflowing in gratitude for the forgiveness she already knows she has. When read in that light, we see that this story has much to teach us about the ways Jesus interacts with us in the midst of our gratitude.

CONTENT

Read Luke 7: 36-50 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (*Option A, B, or C*) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. The woman shows up at the house with an alabaster jar, indicating that she most likely planned to anoint Jesus. But what else do we see her doing? What emotions are conveyed here? Why do you imagine they arise in the presence of Jesus?
2. Notice in vs 39 that Simon is talking “to himself”. Why does he conclude that Jesus is not a prophet? How does Jesus’ response to Simon ironically prove he IS a prophet? (leaders note- Jesus can tell what Simon is secretly thinking and responds to his untold thoughts with a story that addresses them)
3. What do we learn that Simon was supposed to do as the host of this party? How do the woman’s actions relate to this?
4. The parable in this scene could incorrectly be understood to indicate that there are “greater” or “lesser” amounts of sin, but Scripture overwhelmingly confirms that “all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). If this story is not talking about “amounts” of sin, what might it be illustrating? Or in other words, what does the woman seemed to understand that Simon doesn’t?
5. If the woman already knows that she has been forgiven, why do you think Jesus says it out loud in vs 48? Who is this for? Why does it matter in this context?
6. Jesus summarizes the actions and heart of the woman in one word in vs 50. What does he say her great acts of love and gratitude really convey?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- Simon seems to hold Jesus at arm's length. The woman sits at his feet and draws as close as possible to him. Thinking of these positions (or any in between), how would you describe your “posture” with Jesus right now? Is this different than it has been at other times in your life? What is contributing to the distance or closeness you feel?
- We often feel hesitant or scared to open ourselves to Jesus and to be honest about the places that we have failed or fallen short, or the places in us that need help and healing. How does this story change the way you feel about opening your brokenness to Christ? What does Simon miss by not doing this? How might confession and gratitude be connected?
- Is gratitude part of your prayer life or faith life? What does that look like practically in your life? What prevents you from regular patterns of gratitude? What makes gratitude challenging?
- The gratitude that flows from the woman in this story has to do with her recognition that she has been forgiven. That she belongs to Jesus. That she has access to her Redeemer. How is this kind of gratitude perhaps different from how we often think about gratitude?

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

God of forgiveness and grace- What a wonder it is that you long to share the table with sinners. Not just in these ancient stories, but even today. Even with us. God, would you give us the courage to come to the table? To come out of the shadows, to put down our defenses, and to open ourselves honestly to you so that we can receive the gift of being known and forgiven. And out of that gift, would you open us up to unencumbered gratitude? Gratitude that flows from knowing that at the table of the King, grace always gets the last word. May the love that comes from this grace flavor our tears, our words, our actions and our lives. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our great host- Amen.