

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The theme for this week is "Persistent Mercy," and in the appointed Gospel for today, we heard the account of a woman who displayed an absolute trust in Christ's mercy as she cried out after to Him, even though He seemed to be ignoring her.

We find out that He wasn't ignoring her, but testing her, to draw out the beautiful expression of her faith.

In our text for meditation this morning, we see the other side of persistent mercy, not so much on the part of the one requesting mercy, but from the one giving it. And what persistent mercy! it is given even to the one who wasn't asking for it.

As follows in Jesus' name:

One of the Pharisees asked [Jesus] to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind Him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this Man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And He said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jewish faith that prided itself on observing the Law of God, and Simon is one such Pharisee.

They lived, at least outwardly, what would have been considered to be a godly-looking life.

They were not expecting mercy from God, or at least not too much; they thought they were earning their place in heaven.

Like other such men, Simon had invited Jesus, not because he considered Him to be the Christ/Savior, but he was looking to test Jesus, to see if He was all people thought Him to be.

Now, Jesus isn't stupid. He knows what Simon is up to... and still He takes the invitation.

He is willing to be tested, even by someone who doubts Him and probably wants to see Him fail.

But why would Jesus do this? ... I bet it has something to do with our theme...

He was there to show mercy to Simon, to patiently call Him to repentance and faith.

We see Jesus' mercy at the meal first in accepting the praise and service of the woman.

He knew very well **who she was and what sort of woman this was who was touching Him.**

And unlike Simon, she knew very well who Jesus was, which is why she was there.

Realize the major *faux pas*, or social blunder, she was making.

Never would she have been invited — or allowed — to enter a Pharisee's house.

She was a sinner — unclean... because of her life choices.

And yet she risked the embarrassment, the humiliation, the shame, to do this thing for Jesus.

It's apparent that she had already heard Jesus; she knew that there was forgiveness with Him.

No doubt, her tears were tears of regret and guilt, but also of joy.

But she can't be kept from Jesus... and He wouldn't push her away.

But this opened up the door for Jesus to show mercy to Simon also.

What Simon had already judged about Jesus in his thoughts (that He is not a prophet) was soon be revealed to be entirely false.

...In truth, Jesus could have kept silent and allowed Simon to continue thinking so judgmentally, both about Jesus Himself, and the woman; nobody would have known what Simon was thinking.

But in His mercy Jesus initiates the conversation, "**Simon, I have something to say to you,**" and then tells him a parable about merciful forgiveness and responding love.

Note that in the parable both of the men were debtors, neither of them could repay, no matter how much or little the amount.

And when the parable was done, He asked Simon to judge between the debtors, which loved the moneylender more?

Simon hesitated a little, "**The one, I suppose...**" he said. It seems like a trick question.

One would think both of them should love the moneylender, no matter the amount.

But logically, the one who has the greater debt, should appreciate the sizable gift of the forgiveness.

And from there, Jesus does something that was probably the last thing anyone there would have —

He drew attention to the woman.

The Pharisee and his company saw her, but she was an object of scorn and her service to Jesus was despicable to them.

The woman probably felt awkward as Jesus was talking about her, in front of her, & in grateful tones.

But that is exactly what Jesus does... and then He forgives her and bids her depart in peace.

But now the tables get turned on Simon.

She is clean and his sins are on display; he comes out the sinner.

In His persistent mercy, Jesus shows Simon where His heart was wrong.

Simon had done none of the things that a hospitable host would customarily have done:

not only had he not had Jesus' feet washed, but neither had he given Jesus any water for His feet.

Nor had he greeted Jesus with any customary kiss, like we would greet someone with a handshake.

The oil on the head would have been something for a favored guest, which Jesus was not at this point.

To leave the feet dirty, to not greet a guest in the customary fashion was simply rude, a *faux pas*.

But the contrast was so obvious.

The woman wets His feet with her tears. She uses her hair to wipe them (not exactly a thirsty towel). But even this does not stop her from kissing His feet. Such humility... such gratitude... such love. And the costly ointment being brought into Simon's house shows that she had planned it out. Can you judge which of the two knew that her debt had been forgiven and which one thought little of any forgiveness? Simon's lack of faith in Jesus as his Savior is betrayed by his lack of hospitality and gratitude.

So Jesus' persistent mercy upon Simon is displayed in calling him to repentance of his pride, both towards God - whose feet he would not stoop to wash or have washed, or even provide water, and whose **Son he would not kiss, lest He be angry**, (Psalm 2) and towards man - who he would judge as unfit for God's persistent mercy and forgiveness. Jesus concluded with Simon, "**But he who is forgiven little, loves little.**" It is not that Jesus considered Simon to have fewer sins to forgive (50 denarii worth) while the woman had more (500 denarii worth); this demarcation was more along the line of what each one might perceive their debt to be. Simon thought he had fewer sins to be forgiven of, and so he expected only a little forgiveness/mercy.

But Jesus doesn't just talk about the woman; He then turns His complete attention to her and says, "**Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**" In these words, Jesus makes clear, first and foremost, God's forgiveness. She need never doubt it. And secondly, He makes clear that it is not her love that is the cause of her forgiveness, for He says, "**Your faith has saved you.**" Her acts of love (cleaning, wiping, kissing, and anointing Him) were an expression of her faith. She knew she had a **larger debt** and that it had been forgiven, and so, in response, in Jesus' words, **she loved much**.

And I wonder if Jesus' mercy did not have its effect on Simon. I say this because normally, only Jesus' prominent opponents are named in the Gospels. It is usually the names of believers are that shared, like Jairus, blind Bartimaeus, and Simon the leper. This would be an odd case, where a relatively minor opponent is named. And so I wonder, if his name isn't dropped in here because he became a believer in the Church, prominent among St. Luke's original readers, perhaps known to Theophilus. Perhaps inviting Theophilus or anyone else to go and ask Simon about the story. Perhaps it was Simon himself who told St. Luke first hand, remembering back to that day when the Lord Jesus showed persistent mercy upon him and forgave him of his many sins.

...

Jesus is indeed the Prophet, who *searches the heart*. He knows both **who and what sort of man or woman** you are, whether a sinner whose sins are on display for all to see, or a pious-looking sinner with unloving, unmerciful thoughts and judgments. It is not a matter of how many or how few sins you think you have, the truth is that you are in debt to the Lord and cannot repay it, whether much or little. Furthermore, the truth is that Jesus has not only paid your debt in full by bearing your guilt and sin and suffering your punishment on the cross, but He has also lived a life of perfect steadfast love and persistent mercy on your behalf. It is also true that He is persistently merciful and forgives your sins.

In your baptism, He has named you His child and written your name in the book of life.
And now declares to you, **“Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria