



WASHING HIS FEET WITH OUR TEARS

Picture the scene: you're out with friends, maybe sharing a meal or having a drink, and someone says or does something so shocking, so embarrassing, so downright inappropriate, you don't know what to say next; a real 'mic-drop' moment. Has that ever happened to you? (Maybe you were the culprit! It's OK, we won't judge.)

Today we're going to look at a scenario like that, where people are sharing a meal, and someone gate-crashes. Only it's not the gate-crasher who shocks the most ...

Luke 7:36-50

Jesus is dining with Simon the Pharisee, probably *al fresco*, when this woman approaches. Tradition says this is Mary Magdalene, which could be right. The intriguing thing is that a similar event is recorded in Matthew and Mark as taking place in the last week of Jesus' life, and in John 12, we're told the woman involved then was Mary sister of Martha and Lazarus. Now the events are obviously not the same, because the timescales and situations are different. But is it the same Mary? It's hard to tell.

But it's what the woman does that matters. She loosens her hair, weeps over His feet, dries them with her locks, kisses them, and then pours perfume over them. Now you might be thinking, "If someone were to do that today it might look a bit ... iffy." Hey, never mind today: it would have looked even iffier then! A woman would never have let her hair down in public, never

have talked to a man she didn't know, let alone kissed his feet (no wonder the Pharisees went ballistic!).

And yet ... Jesus lets her.

So, what is this story about? It's about forgiveness, and how to know it. And this is relevant to all of us here today, because 1) we all need forgiving, and 2) we all need to know we are! So, how can we be sure?

According to this passage, you know you've been forgiven ...

1) When you love Him truthfully. To wash the feet of another was an act of submission. But Mary goes a bit further than that. She shocks her audience – and shames herself – by doing something that would have been expected of a prostitute (even the perfume was commonly associated with prostitution – Proverbs 7:16-17).

In reality, this is an act of true love. This woman – who has probably known so many men over the years (in the biblical sense) – has finally met a man who truly loves her. And she expresses her love in the only way she knows how, irrespective of what everyone else thinks.

When you love someone, you don't spend your time worrying about how this is going to look to everyone else (just think of the strange noises / faces parents make to their kids!); the one that matters most is the one you love (and we probably all need to remember that). If we're forgiven, we will love Him – regardless of risk or cost.

And if we love Him, we will not be able to contain it.

2) When you love Him gratefully. This passage is set out as a chiasmus (from the Greek *x* or *chi*), where the first half of a passage is reflected in the second half. Like this:

Entering Simon's house
The woman's actions
Simon's response
Jesus' parable
Simon's response
The woman's actions
Departing Simon's house

What's in the centre, in the heart of the passage? Jesus' parable – a story within a story (vs40-43). And what is it saying? That sin is a debt, an IOU (the Aramaic word for 'sin', *khoba*, is also the Aramaic word for 'debt'); that forgiveness is a debt cleared; and that forgiveness shows itself in gratitude. All of which means:

- **We have to admit we've blown it.** One of the greatest obstacles to a person being set free is admitting they need it. It's true of Simon; the Pharisees; all of us.
- **We have to ask God to cancel it.** To tear up the debt, the IOU, the *khoba*. Because He's the one who's been sinned against, so only He can cover that cost.

When this woman washes Jesus' feet, she is recognising that God / Jesus is going to cancel her debt, on the cross. How can we know that we're forgiven? By recognising that God / Jesus *has* cancelled our debt, on the cross.

And loving Him for it.

3) When you love Him worshipfully. This woman has been weeping and drying and kissing and pouring, over and over again (the tense is imperfect in Greek). Why the tears? It could be out of sorrow. It could be out of joy. But I think it is also out of worship. She is making up for what Simon has failed to do. She is honouring Jesus.

Jesus makes that clear when He turns his back on Simon (!) and says, "Simon, do you see this woman?" Another one of Jesus' crazy questions! Of *course* he can see her. What Jesus means is, "Do you *really* see this woman? Who she is, what she's done, how she became the person she is, what is going on in her heart, and why she's done what she's done today?" When Simon looked at the woman, he saw a sinner. Jesus is saying, "I see a *forgiven* sinner. How can you tell? Because she loves Me." And then He says to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." And the Pharisees mutter among themselves, "Who is this who has the gall to forgive sins?" Only God can forgive sins, right? Right.

The woman has recognised something about Jesus which Simon has not: in Jesus, God has seen her (like Hagar in Genesis 16:13). So, she does what she has to do: she worships.

If you're forgiven, you will want to worship.

Go In Peace

So how do we know someone is a forgiven person? How do you know *you* are? It's all about what you do with His feet – it's all about love. The only question that will be asked at the end of time will be:

"Did you love Me?"

Some people have read this story and assumed that Jesus is saying, "You have to love Me in order to be forgiven." But that's the wrong way round. What He's actually saying is, "You have to be forgiven in order to love Me." Love flows out of gratitude, and gratitude flows out of forgiveness. I.e. it's a result, not a requirement.

As it says in 1 John 4:10: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us." And in vs19: "We love because He first loved us."

Question is: do you know that you're forgiven? Today?