

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen!

Hear this Word of the Lord:

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that [Jesus] 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. (Lk 7:37–38)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

Generosity! Let’s think about the idea of giving generously.

Let’s think about generous giving,
not exclusively as financial,
but as a lifestyle of deep love for Jesus
and extraordinary generosity toward opportunities of service
and the advance of his kingdom.

This is to say that generous giving is both relational and missional as well as financial.

[Generous Giver]

Luke 7 immortalizes a woman who is an incredibly generous giver.

Her generous giving is an example of giving up.

Now, let me be clear...

She did not give up by quitting on God or walking away from God.

No.

Giving up for her is generosity expressed as deep devotion and affection toward Jesus.

Giving up for her was anointing his feet with costly perfume.

Her story is relational. Jesus loves her, and she responds with deep love.

Her story is missional. Rather than exclude her, Jesus forgives her sin and restores her.

Her story is financial. With amazing gratitude,

she presents Jesus with the costly gift of perfume, which she pours over his feet.

Her story is one of generous giving.

Step into her story with me.

Imagine living your adult life on the shadowy edge of acceptability.

Imagine being marginalized and excluded from all social life.

Imagine the pain of disapproving looks from most and the chuckling of others –

All because of a damaged reputation.

We do not know her name. We do not know her specific history.
The Bible simply describes her as an “open sinner.”
Her sad story is common knowledge.

The condemning judgment of others is her constant companion,
from which she has no escape.
To make matters worse,
those who know her story best and are quickest to point out her mistakes
are from the religious community.

In a context like this,
it’s easy for to conclude that if the religious community rejects her,
God must reject her as well.

In a context like this,
the dark, deep stain on her life is absolved by Christ himself.
The condition of her sin and all the expressions of that condition are forgiven by the Savior.
“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven” (Lk 7:47).

Her history is not ignored. **JUST THE OPPOSITE!**
Her history is fully acknowledged and completely forgiven.
“Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (v 50).

Now we return to the high drama of the text.
Jesus is invited into the home of one of the religious community’s leaders—
a Pharisee by the name of Simon.
To be part of this group, Simon would be well-informed of the Old Testament faith
and of the rules and laws of Jewish traditions.
Jesus is present in his home and sitting at his table for a meal.

The woman learns of Jesus’ location. She goes there, carrying a jar of costly perfume.
From behind, she approaches Jesus.
With her tears, she wets his feet.
With her hair, she wipes and dries his feet.
She kisses his feet and anoints them with her perfume.

And how could you not notice?
Her presence and her actions attract the attention of all who are present.
Amongst themselves, they question, ***“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”*** (v 39).

They think... because of her personal history, Jesus should have nothing to do with her.

This prompts Jesus to share a faith story.

Two men owe another man a debt.

The first owes an amount equal to about twenty months' salary.

The second owes an amount equal to about two months' salary.

Both debts are canceled.

Jesus asks, ***“Which of them [the two debtors] will love him [the man who canceled the debts] more?”*** (v 42).

And the answer is obvious to all attending the dinner. ***“The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”*** Jesus replies, ***“You have judged rightly”*** (v 43).

Then Jesus speaks to the host, the woman, and the entire dinner party.
He makes clear the point of the faith story.

While no water was provided to wash Jesus' feet,

the woman washed them with her tears.

While no towel was provided to dry Jesus' feet,

she dried them with her hair.

While Jesus was not greeted with a kiss,

she kissed his feet.

While no oil was provided to anoint Jesus' head,

she poured costly perfume over his feet.

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much.

But he who is forgiven little, loves little” (v 47).

Jesus' point is not that she gave a lot to get a lot. No.

Jesus' encounter, story, and conclusion

clarify the woman's generous giving.

Her giving is an extravagant act of love

directed to the God who would

1. love her,
2. see her pain and humiliation,
3. forgive her sins and
4. restore her dignity.

Her legacy of generous giving is “giving up.”

Tears. Hair. Kisses. Perfume.

She gives far beyond what one might expect,

because she first receives from Jesus

more than she could ever have imagined or hoped.

[Giving Up]

You see, God's love is not measured out carefully according to one's capacity to keep religious rules or laws. One's performance does not define the Gospel of God's love.

Jesus acts because he is love.

Jesus forgives because he is the Savior.

Jesus makes lives whole that can never accomplish wholeness by trying hard
or measuring up to another's requirements.

Measuring up and giving up are two very different dynamics
with two very different outcomes.

To measure up means that somehow I pass the test, I meet the standard,
and I am to be congratulated for my achievement. It's all about me!

To "give up," in this generous sense, is to recognize that
I cannot pass the test or meet the standard, achieve the position,
or perform at the level that surpasses my sin,
but that while others may say, "**do better; do right,**"
Jesus says, "**forgiven.**"

[Conclusion]

Jesus gives the incredible gift that I cannot earn or deserve; that no one else can give.
"Forgiven." "Faith." You see, in reality, it's all about him!

I cannot separate the cross of Christ from this amazing encounter in the life of Christ.
Forgiven. That is what she is.
Generous giving. That is what she does.

The same feet that she holds and caresses will be nailed to the cross.
The same voice that speaks words of forgiveness will cry out in agony, "**It is finished**" (Jn 19:30).
The debt required by the Father is paid in full, not by her, but by him.

Jesus' generous giving is an extravagant, extraordinary act of love that only God can give.

This is true for you and me as well.

Our generous giving toward God begins with God's generous gift to us.

It's not about us. It's ALWAYS about him! Be generous and give up! Amen!

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. AMEN! (*1 Thessalonians 5:16–18*)
