

HOLY VESSELS: TREASURED
Sermon preached by Martha Jean Fitch
Lent 5 March 21, 2021

TEXT: Luke 7:37-50

MANUSCRIPT:

Ron Hutchcraft tells the story how his son and daughter-in-law went on a vacation to Colorado and brought home a souvenir of a little piece of rhodochrosite stone. And with the stone came the story. Their host told them about the men in search of gold back in the mid-19th century who didn't care much about this rock they found - on their way to the gold. Initially, they just tossed it aside. But they noticed that embedded in the granite was an attractive rose-colored stone. As they refined it, the rare and rich, almost ruby-like color of that stone revealed its beauty. This is an example of another stone with incredibly beautiful ruby crystals inside. There was a time when these stones were used for making driveways or even just discarded. But today a relatively few ounces are worth thousands of dollars!¹ Once cut and polished – they can be absolutely beautiful stones – or even stunning jewelry. Here you can see how the stone is wrapped with jewelry wire to make a necklace and earrings.

Rhodochrosite – a stone that was just thrown away because no one knew the real treasure that it held within and how much it was worth. You know, there are lots of people like that. Overlooked – undervalued. Sometimes we do that to others – judging them to not be worth much. We recall their past and hold it against them OR all we see is their rough exterior. OR maybe - sometimes we even do that to ourselves!

But Jesus looks at people – and looks at you – and finds a great treasure where others only see garbage and trash. So many of the people Jesus met were folks who were broken and estranged, the ill and oppressed, people who were seen by others as hopeless or untouchable. And yet Jesus reached out to them all and offered them the incredible gift of grace. He just seemed to be able to see the treasure within.

And today's story is no different. Today, we have traveled to the town of Nain. Nain is a village of Galilee, about 25 miles south of Capernaum. Jesus has gone on another road trip...this time on a missionary tour around the Sea of Galilee. Look with me at Luke 7:11-17. In this story, as Jesus walks into Nain, he meets a poor widow who is walking in a funeral procession – the funeral of her only son. And Jesus has compassion on this woman – this is just the kind of person Jesus has come to help! So, Jesus stops the funeral procession and calls out to the young man, saying: “Young man, I say to you, rise!” – and with that the dead man sat up and began to speak! And the people were amazed and word about Jesus spread throughout all of Judea and the surrounding area.

Next, in verses 18-35, we hear Jesus talking about John the Baptist.

We read here that the religious leaders had criticized John the Baptist because he fasted and drank no wine....and accused him of having a demon. Now they are criticizing Jesus. And why? They accuse him of being “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”

And then, in our main story for today we see the criticism and Jesus’ friendship with sinners described beautifully. The story opens with Jesus accepting an invitation to eat dinner at a Pharisee’s house named Simon. Now, it is important for us to understand what would happen in a typical house when a Rabbi like Jesus came to visit. William Barclay gives us great insight into the customs of the day. He says:

The houses of well-to-do people were built around an open courtyard . . . and in the warm weather, meals were eaten. It was the custom that when a Rabbi was at a meal in such a house, all kinds of people came in – they were quite free to do so – to listen to the pearls of wisdom which fell from his lips. . . .

When a guest entered such a house three things were always done. The host placed his hand on the guest’s shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. That was a mark of respect which was never omitted in the case of a distinguished Rabbi. The roads were only dust trails, and shoes were merely soles held in place by straps across the foot. So cool water was poured over the guest’s feet to cleanse and comfort them. Either a pinch of sweet-smelling incense was burned or a drop of perfume of roses was placed on the guest’s head. These things good manners demanded. . . .

In the east, the guests did not sit, but reclined, at table. They lay on low couches, resting on the left elbow, leaving during the meal, the sandals were taken off.¹

So, Jesus comes to Simon’s house and took his place, reclining at the table. And what should happen next, but a woman comes to the dinner party who causes quite a stir.

Let’s hear what happens as Jake Runge reads to us from Luke 7:37-50:

³⁷ *When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. ³⁸ Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.*

³⁹ *When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She’s a sinner!” ⁴⁰ Then Jesus answered his thoughts. “Simon,” he said to the Pharisee, “I have something to say to you.” “Go ahead, Teacher,” Simon replied.*

⁴¹ Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. ⁴² But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?” ⁴³ Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt.” “That’s right,” Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

⁴⁷ “I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.” ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹ The men at the table said among themselves, “Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?” ⁵⁰ And Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Now we don’t know exactly who this woman is – all we know is that she was of the city and that she was a sinner. Some believe that she was a prostitute...or perhaps maybe an adulterer. Everyone in Nain probably knew who this woman was. Maybe she had sacrificed all of her innocence and lived a wicked and evil life. Probably for all the world, this woman looks just like an old rock, abandoned at the mine in Colorado – worthless and of no value. But it seems that in the midst of her sinful life, the woman had heard about Jesus. It is most likely that she had heard of His compassion for the sorrowing widow of Nain. And then, maybe she heard Jesus’ teaching – and had heard that he was a friend of sinners. Maybe she had heard him tell stories of God’s forgiveness like the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Right in the midst of her sinful life, perhaps she had started to turn her life around, and went the road that led to Jesus.

So, into this Pharisee’s house, she comes, unclean, uninvited and out of place. In her hands was an expensive jar of alabaster perfume. It was probably her most prized possession. When she gets a glimpse of Jesus, she is moved to tears. Perhaps she sees her degraded life in the white light of Jesus. Guilt and shame well up within her as well as tender gratitude and incredible love ... so she flings herself at the feet of Jesus. That alabaster jar is broken, and the essence of pure nard spills out and over the feet of Jesus. And with her hair, she wipes away the tears – kisses the feet of Jesus and pours out her precious perfume – lavishing upon Jesus all her love.”³

Simon sees this woman and is full of contempt – for this ungodly woman *and* for Jesus! He can’t believe Jesus is letting this happen and is not stopping this sinful woman from anointing his feet. And so, Simon starts talking to himself. Look at verse 39. He says, “*If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him.*”

But somehow Jesus hears his thoughts – for Jesus always seems to know what we’re thinking. And so, He tells Simon a parable of a great gift of forgiveness...of one who is forgiven a small amount of debt and another forgiven a big amount of debt. And asks, “Which

of the two would be more grateful?” Simon answers correctly by saying, “The one who was forgiven the most”.

Jesus then compares and contrasts the way Simon treated him, as a guest in his home, and how this woman treated Jesus. *“You did not put oil even on my head, but she has poured perfume on My feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she has loved much. But he who has been forgiven little - loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven. . . . Your faith has saved you. Go in peace!’”*

Well, those words were like blasphemy to the Pharisees. They believed that only God could forgive sins. Who was this man to say He could forgive sins? Who is He? Along with the woman who anointed his feet, we know Him to be the Christ, our Savior who indeed did come to redeem sinners. He came to save the sins of a prostitute and a tax collector. He came to save the sins of a disciple who betrayed him and of a thief on the cross. He came to save the sins of the people who crucified him and of the man who persecuted him – the Apostle Paul. And the good news is that Jesus has come to save even the likes of you and of me.

The Apostle Paul declared this good news in his letter to the Romans. There, in the 5th chapter, Paul says: *“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, through someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”* (vv. 6-8) Jesus died on the Cross and paid the penalty for our sin – right when we *least* deserved it! Not because of how worthy we are – but because of how deeply we are loved!

You know Simon the Pharisee looked at the woman who was a sinner and he was disgusted. He saw her as unworthy – too damaged – someone who would never change. Oh, how often we can have that attitude when we judge others. And maybe, we have even looked at ourselves that way. We hear the lies that go on in our heads that say: “Look at who you are! You’re not good enough! You’ll never change. God can never love me as I am!”

But Jesus looked at this sinful woman – with eyes different from the eyes of Simon. He looked at her with eyes of love. He saw the treasure she was and was moved to forgive her of her sins. He had an attitude that said: “I see promise in you and I’m going to give you a new start by forgiving you.”

The good news we celebrate today is that we have a Savior who sees promise in us and He is not going to give up on us. When we come and kneel before the feet of Jesus, confessing our sins and offering our hearts to him – again and again he is faithful to forgive us. No matter what road we’ve been on – no matter what mistakes we have made – no matter what our past has been – God is there for us, loving us and forgiving us again and again.

Can you see the love in His eyes? You are a one-of-a-kind, priceless treasure, that He thinks is worth dying for! He sees within you that precious jewel – and He loves you dearly.

Today, won't you come, like the woman with the alabaster jar, and kneel before the Lord? Come and confess your sins and your faith in Christ and take Him as your personal Lord and Savior? Christ is waiting for you to come with arms open wide. Won't you come today?

RESOURCES

¹Ron Hutchcraft, *A Word With You*, "Overlooked Treasure", <https://hutchcraft.com/a-word-with-you/your-hindrances/overlooked-treasure-5460>

Also, information about Rhodochrosite stones at the Sweet Home Mine in Colorado:
<https://gem-a.com/gem-hub/around-the-world/american-gemstones-sweet-home>

²William Barclay, Luke, page 93.

³Chuck Swindoll, The Continuation of Something Great, p. 21.