**Luke 7 Part A**

One of the adjustments for me as a pastor is the wide variety of things I might encounter in a given day. On a really busy day it could happen that I spend time talking to someone who’s in the hospital, then someone who’s going through marriage problems, then someone planning for something, then someone with a Bible question. They are all very different and you go back and forth kind of quickly. Because of all the jumping back and forth, sometimes, it takes me a minute to think of what to say. They way you treat a shut in is very different from the way you talk to a prospect, for example.

To me, this makes Jesus all the more amazing. We all come to him at very different places in life, with different struggles and difficulties and needs. In one sense, broadly speaking, he gives us all the same thing. He gives us all salvation. But in another sense, in the narrow sense, he meets us all exactly where we are and brings that salvation in exactly the way we need. And that’s what we’ll see in our readings. We begin with his response to a rich, humble army officer:

**When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”**

A centurion was an officer in the Roman army. He would have been fairly wealthy. It’s not clear why he was in Galilee, but apparently he was an oddity. Usually the Romans and Jews were not great friends, but he seems to have been valued highly. It’s interesting. It’s key that they say, “This man *deserves* to have you do this.” Why? Because he is friendly to the Jews. He even built their house of worship.

So, in their minds, he is worthy. He deserves it. Is that how Jesus decided who to heal and who to save, if the person deserved it or not? No, not at all! But this is how they looked at things. How does the Centurion look at things?

**6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”**

Wow, the Centurion, he really gets it. First of all, he did not think he deserved anything. He realized that he was a sinful person who did not deserve God’s presence. I hope that if you are the kind of upstanding guy that everyone likes, and outwardly people would look at you and say, “Yeah, that’s a good christian man. He deserves god’s love and care.” Yet I hope you realize that you are not worthy either. None of us has earned God’s love. This centurion though, he realized Jesus was merciful, and that he was powerful.

You don’t read other stories like this. This demonstrated amazing faith on the Centurion’s part. No human healers claimed to do this. The centurion had to understand that Jesus was in fact divine. That he was in fact from God. He has authority over all things, even diseases in far-off towns, and he can heal with at will. No wonder Jesus reacted this way:

**9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.**

Jesus was amazed at this man’s faith. What an honor! It was humble, and it was totally confident. And it came from a person who you would not expect it from: A Roman. A non-Jew who made his career in the violent, oppressive Roman army. What does this story have to teach us?

God wants to give us a humble, confident faith. Our humility comes from recognizing our own unworthiness, and we’ll actually come back to that topic in the third reading. But our confidence comes from knowing who Jesus is. Look at this guy’s faith. He had never heard of anyone being healed remotely before. But he had complete confidence that Jesus could and would do the impossible and the unheard of.

Jesus is the almighty God. He has authority over everything. And even though we don’t deserve it, he has promised to get us through anything and everything. It might seem normal to freak out when you lose a job, or get a diagnosis. People might even expect it. People might even worry about you if you seem too calm. But why shouldn’t you be calm? You know that the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, is your God. He came to this earth and died for you. What can you possibly face that he can’t handle? He’s ruling all things for you. What detail of your life has he possibly missed? If he chooses to allow you to suffer, it might really stink, but you know he’ll be there for you every step of the way. He’ll give you the strength you need when you need it. Each day he’ll protect and provide for you until that last day. And on that last day you have complete confidence. If you ask people, “Do you think you’ll go to heaven,” they will often say, “I hope so,” or “I think probably…” Jesus has promised. He wants you to know this and to have absolute confidence. Whatever you’re facing, know that Jesus can snap his fingers and make it go away if he wants. When you lose a job, when a spouse threatens divorce, when a doctor calls, Jesus still has everything completely under control. When he puts you through a trial, don’t doubt his presence, instead, call upon his grace and power.

And the last thing, being confident in Jesus has nothing to do with yourself. You’re not worthy. That’s what people think religion is all about, but it’s not. If you are worried about being worthy enough, stop it. If if you just committed the most stupid, obnoxious sin, don’t let your worthiness stop you from taking your requests to Jesus. What matters is not our worthiness but his power and compassion. And that’s what we’ll see in our next reading.

**Part B:**

Jesus travelled all around Galilee. Here is the town of Nain (PowerPoint). Jesus had a great crowd with him, and yet they met another crowd.

**11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.**

Her husband was dead. She only had one son, and he was dead. There was no one to help her in her old age. This was devastating for her future. Yet, I doubt that’s what was going through her mind. It must have just been the immediate pain of the loss. He was all she had left, and he was gone. Some people never recover from the loss of a child. How much more so an only child, how much more for a widow. The crowd must have been filled with pity. But not only the crowd:

**13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”**

The Lord Jesus saw her, and his heart went out to her too. Literally in Greek the word means his insides ached for her. Perhaps you have had the experience that you were so sad or overcome with grief that you literally ached. It’s important for us to remember that when Jesus looks around this world and sees the pain and suffering our rebellion has caused, he is grieved. It hurts him to his core. He created us for life, joy, and peace, not misery, pain, and death. He knew her pain and he was determined to put an end to it. Yet, when he told a grieving widow not to cry, it might have seemed insensitive and insulting. Why would you say that to a grieving widow?

**14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still.**

What tension this must have created? What do you do? Do you stop for this wandering rabbi? He had committed a faux pas. He was not supposed to touch a coffin. He was now unclean. This was slightly embarrassing for him and for everyone. Yet they much have been touched that he took the time to make this kind gesture. Then, he took it to a place that was a first even for Jesus:

**He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.**

In an instant the boy went from laying dead on a mat to sitting up and talking. What do you think he said. Where am I? What are you doing to me? Who knows. But he was alive. This was the first of several miracles in which Jesus raised someone from the dead. This had only happened a few times in Israel’s history. It was only the greatest of the prophets, Elijah, Elisha, who could perform such a great miracle. So the reaction of the crowd is not a surprise:

**16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.**

Jesus compassion and his power over death are the two most important lessons from this event. When he sees you in your sin and misery, his heart goes out to you. He is filled with grief when we are mistreated. He is filled with sadness when we experience death. He is filled with angst even when we stubbornly persist in sinful behaviors that deep down we know will bring us trouble. His heart goes out to you in all your suffering. Pray to him knowing he listens with compassion.

He does not always answer with a miracle, but the good news is we all get this miracle. We recite the Apostles or Nicene Creed quite often here. We confess I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. We each have a resurrection waiting for us and for our loved ones who die in the Lord. This is a comfort for all of us, and gives us confidence that God can get us through anything. I think this account is a special comfort to those grieving the loss of a child. Jesus knows, and Jesus cares, and Jesus has the power to raise you both and reunite you forever.

When people saw this, they spread the good news of this boy’s resurrection. Isn’t eternal life good news? Isn’t it worth spreading? We sometimes get defensive about the gospel because it confronts people’s sin. But the basic message is this: God is giving you the free gift of eternal life through faith in his eternal son, who came into this world to pay for your sins. Jesus was the only son of his father. The pain it must have caused the Father to send his son and allow him to die was even worse than that of a single mother. Yet he did that for you. What good news. Why not tell someone? Tell someone you know who’s facing a serious illness likely leading to death. I know several of you are in the situation right now. Perhaps write them a short letter and put in the kindest possible terms. I want you to face eternity with confidence. You don’t need to be afraid of death. Jesus came into this world and gave his life to give you eternal life.

**Part C:**

Last week we saw that Jesus ate in the homes of tax collectors and hung out with sinners. But he also hung out with Pharisees from time to time. Remember the Pharisees were the most religious, devout people of their day. They kept all sorts of special diets, routines, and rules, most of which they had invented, based on the Bible, in the name of God. These were the wealthy, succesful, self-disciplined people who had it all together and didn’t mind telling you so. They probably would have written self-help books if they lived today.

**36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.**

The fact that he invited Jesus to dinner shows that at the beginning he considered Jesus to be his equal. A pharisee would not normally have just anyone over for dinner. **37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured 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 who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”**

“Life was far more public in the first century than it is today, and at a dinner party such as this one, interested (but uninvited) observers were allowed to stand on the sidelines and listen to the conversation of influential guests. This woman, probably a prostitute, is despised not because she “crashes” the party, but because her sinful lifestyle brings defilement to the gathering. The religious elite would never socialize with or even touch such a person. This makes her actions toward Jesus particularly offensive to those present.”

And she was here doing something crazy! Pouring perfume all over his feet. That perfume, depending what kind it was, could have cost from a few months wages to a year’s wages for the average person. And she dumped it. Not just on Jesus’ head, but on his feet! Of all the parts of your body, do you really need perfume on your feet?

But this was not a practical gift, that that’s where we probably get confused. This was a gesture. It would be been extra touching that she would seemingly “waste” this expense on him. This is clear, because, what is she doing? Crying. Actually imagine this as a real event for a moment. You’re out to eat and there’s someone standing next to your booth… crying? Are you okay with this? And back to Jesus, she’s behind him, using her many, many tears to wet her hair and clean his feet. This is gross. She kisses his feet. Kisses. How many of you would kiss another person’s feet for $100? What on earth does this communicate?

That she is incredibly grateful to Jesus. He is so valuable that just his feet are worth thousands of dollars worth of perfume, wiping with your own hair, even kissing. He must have done something very amazing to be so valuable to her. That should would want to honor him in this way.

But the Pharisee was shocked. And he only thought to himself, I thought Jesus was a prophet. This is ironic, since Jesus knows that he’s thinking. But the man says, “There’s no way he could know this woman’s background. If he did, he would definitely not allow her to embarass him like this.”

**40 Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”**

**“Tell me, teacher,” he said.**

**41 “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”**

**43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.”**

**“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.**

I think we all understand the story, right? It’s pretty obvious. But Jesus turns it back on the man in a way he probably didn’t see coming:

**44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”**

Now don’t read this and just nod along and say, yeah, Jesus, that’s right, you show him. This is a pretty amazing claim. What would you think if we had a member who insisted on shining my shoes in the back of church? Would you really not feel awkward? I would too. Because I don’t deserve that. But Jesus deserves that and more. This woman understand that Jesus was not just a person or a likeable teacher. This was the person who forgave her sins. And as wayward as she was, should would know that was something only God can do. And just to drive the point home:

**48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”**

**49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”**

**50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”**

He forgave her. She must have had a pretty bad life. She probably made some big mistakes. It’s possible she had some illegitimate children and struggled to raise them. Whatever the reason she had gotten into her life of sin, it was likely hard to get out. She had done shameful thing after shameful thing. And Jesus washed it all away. No wonder she wanted to do everything she could, going over the top, to honor and thank him while he was there.

If you remember two weeks ago we heard a similar story about Jesus forgiving the sins of a paralyzed man. You almost get the impression that Jesus forgave people their sins all the time. And that’s why we focus on that so much. It never gets old. We never get past it. We grow in our faith, but we never need the forgiveness of sins any less than we did before. We all need it, and we all need it all the time. Thank God he gives it to us so freely.

We have the season of Lent coming up. This is a time to focus on repenting. It is a time for inward reflection. You will have the opportunity to make private confession and absolution. I think this is a good time to review what that looks like in your hymnal….