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What Will Jesus Say About You?

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Luke 7:36-38

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was 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.

Have you ever seen the segment on the NBC Nightly News called "The Fleecing of America"? It always tells a story about some monumental governmental waste of money.

I don't know about you, but nothing makes my blood pressure go up higher or quicker than someone else being extravagantly wasteful with my tax dollars!

Being a resident of Erie County, I pay particular attention to how my tax dollars are being spent. With the county in debt and laying off workers, I don't understand why the County Legislature just gave one million dollars to put artificial turf on a high school football field in the City of Buffalo.

But what I see as an extravagant waste of somebody else's money doesn't just come in great, big numbers. It's also noticed in smaller ways. Just say you're at the grocery store. You've been shopping wisely. You want a steak for dinner, but you settle for the ground beef that's on sale. While you'd like to get name brand vegetables and products, you've picked out mostly store brands that sell for less.

There you are in the checkout line. The person in front of you is buying a beautiful filet mignon. Your mouth waters at the thought, even while you look at your ground beef. The person in front of you puts all brand named items on the counter. If only you had the money to shop like that. Then, the person in front of you pays for all those purchases with food stamps. And on top of it all, pulls out five dollars in cash to buy lottery tickets!

And right then, for a moment, you get angry.

Today's story in the Gospel of Luke is like that. It's about an extravagant waste of money and resources by somebody who couldn't afford it. It isn't about spending any one else's tax dollars, and it would never have been covered on "The Fleecing of America," but it still a big impression on the followers of Jesus, because it seems to be a story that was told twice!

It is found here in the story we are using today, from the seventh chapter of Luke. A very similar story is also found in the 26th chapter of Matthew. These may be two accounts of the same incident, with a few changes in the telling.

Whether they are the same or different, both stories start off with people complaining about one thing that is near and dear to almost every person: an extravagant waste of money!

The story tells us that every one who was there in Simon's house when it happened, and every one who heard about it later - every one was upset about it. Every one agreed that woman could have put her money to better use! Every one agreed, but Jesus.

Take a look at what happened.

The story begins with an intrusion, an unwanted guest, an incredible show of bad manners.

This woman that nobody knew walked right in, right off the street. Nobody knew her. Nobody invited her. Nobody wanted her there.

How would you like it if a street walker were to open your front door, walk right into your dining room, and sit right down at your table right in the middle of one of your fancy dinner parties? She wasn't on your guest list. You didn't invite her. You don't even know people like her. You don't have a place for her at your table; but she stormed right in,

uninvited and unwelcome, and rushed right up to your guest of honor. How would you like it?

Simon the Pharisee didn't like it one bit. It was his house. He had invited Jesus to dinner. And just when they sat down to eat, this woman of the street, this sinner, forced her way inside, walked right up to where Jesus was seated, and groveled at his feet.

What was she doing?

What gave her the nerve to break in where she wasn't wanted?

What was on her mind?

Well, the story gives you some idea of what was on her mind. It seems she was determined to get Jesus' attention.

How she came up with such a screw-brained idea, we have no clue.

Maybe she was up on that mountain top and heard Jesus preach. Maybe she saw him perform a miracle. Maybe his words had called her to change her life. Maybe she felt forgiven for all her sins. We don't have a clue. All we know is what the story tells us.

When she heard Jesus was going to be in the neighborhood, when she heard Jesus was going to have dinner at Simon's house; she made a beeline straight for Jesus.

She only had one thing on her mind: she was determined to get to Jesus. She wasn't worried about being rude. She wasn't worried about showing up where she wasn't welcome. She wasn't worried about the consequences.

She didn't care about manners. She didn't care about etiquette. She didn't care about anybody else's feelings.

All she cared about was getting to Jesus. She figured she might never have another opportunity to get near Jesus. She didn't know when or where or if she could ever catch up to him again! So, she decided to grab the opportunity when it came.

And from the moment she burst through the door, uninvited and unwelcome:

- everybody else complained about how rude she was,
- everybody else thought barging in on someone else's dinner party was a bad thing,
- everybody else wanted her to get out!

Would any of you ever act like she did?

No, you wouldn't. You would never be so rude. You would never think about walking into a stranger's house uninvited. You would never even think of it.

But considering what Jesus had to say about that woman, maybe you ought to make that kind of behavior an option for your life. Maybe you can learn something from this woman of the streets. Just maybe her story can teach you an important lesson.

Just maybe you need to learn it: grab the opportunity when it comes your way.

That's the trouble with opportunity. You don't control it. You can't plan for it. Because, when opportunity comes -

- it may not come at the best time for you,
- it may not be very convenient for you,
- it may not be the time you had planned for it to happen,
- but that's the way opportunity is;
 - usually comes when you don't expect it,
 - when you're not ready for it,
 - when it's inconvenient.

That woman of the street who rushed into Simon's house wants you to learn your lesson: when the opportunity comes, you'd better grab it.

It's like the sign posted on the wall of a local thrift shop. "Rules for Thrift Shop shopping," the sign reads, "If you like it, buy it. It won't be here when you come back."

That woman of the street knew that. It's something you need to know, you need to do. It's what she did.

She seized the day.

She grabbed the gold ring.

She took the opportunity when it presented itself.

Because she knew the chance might never come around again!

It wasn't her intention to be rude; she just couldn't take the chance of missing her one opportunity to be near Jesus.

How about you?

Have you ever let an opportunity let slip through your fingers? When your life winds down to its end, do you want to get stuck regretting all the opportunities you missed?

I've been with a lot of people as they were dying. Do you know I have never heard anyone say, "I'm sorry I took a risk. I should have played it safe." The woman from the street wants you to know: life is a risk. That golden ring on the carousel can only be won by somebody who's brave enough to lean out - and stretch out - and grab for it.

You wouldn't have expected it, but that woman of the street came at the right time. Her rudeness was rewarded. Her risk paid off. She got the filet mignon and the lobster tail! She grabbed her one opportunity and ended up exactly where she wanted to be, right there next to Jesus Christ, her Lord and Savior.

It was a long-shot gamble, but as the New York Lottery says, "You've got to be in it to win it."

But she wasn't gambling for money. She was taking a chance on her soul. Have you ever taken a risk of faith like that? What are you afraid to do for Jesus? What are you holding back?

Are you afraid to give more money?

Are you afraid to invest more time?

Are you afraid to really forgive?

Are you afraid to change?

What step of faith are you afraid to make?

What leap of faith looks too steep?

What act of love seems too scary?

That woman of the street says to you: discover what it is that you won't do - and then do it! Because she knows: the opportunity is now. The risk is worth it.

Are you still waiting for the "right time" to come to Christ? Are you waiting to get enough nerve, waiting for tomorrow to be bold, waiting to put more money in the bank before you take a risk?

What are you waiting for? What are you afraid of? What opportunity are you going to let slip through your fingers today?

I don't know about you, but I'm getting tired of being scared. I'm tired of being timid. I'm tired of hiding my feelings and watching my words because I'm afraid I'll hurt someone's feelings. I'm tired of settling for second best. I'm tired of letting someone else's fears hold me back. I'm tired of playing it safe.

- Since I claim to be a Christian, I think it's time to take a leap of faith
- time to take a risk,
 - time to make a stand,
 - time to stand up for something good and honest and true,
 - time to strike out and build something better for tomorrow.

I'm not asking you to sell your house and move up on some mountain top and wait for the end of the world, but I am asking you to dream about tomorrow, to pray about tomorrow, and to take some action aimed at tomorrow - not at simply holding on to what you've got today.

Every church I've ever known that works to hold on to what it's got ends up dwindling in numbers, dwindling in funds, dwindling in faith - until there's nothing left but a tired, dis-spirited, depressed little group of old people waiting to die. A church that grows is a church that seizes the opportunity when the opportunity comes, and barges right in where every one else is afraid to go.

That woman of the streets barged in where she wasn't wanted, but that's not the only thing everybody else complained about. Everybody else complained because she wasted so much money. She couldn't afford to do what she did.

But, you know, if she had done only what she could afford to do, this story would not be in the Bible.

She was a woman of the street. She was a prostitute. She did not have the kind of income that would allow her to be so extravagant. If she had had that kind of money, she wouldn't have been a prostitute.

She had long since surrendered her reputation as a good woman. Do you think she could "afford" to do something now which would suggest that she had surrendered her sanity, too?

Hardly! She could not "afford" another embarrassment any more than she could "afford" an alabaster flask of precious ointment. So why did she act in such an inappropriately wasteful way?

Before she broke that jar, why didn't she ask herself, "How long could this ointment last me if I am careful with it?"

Why didn't she calculate, "How much money could I get for this alabaster jar and ointment if I sold them?"

What made her different? Why did she waste it all on Jesus?

That's not the way most people respond to Jesus Christ. Most people only do for Jesus what they can "afford" to do!

But you know, the Christian message doesn't talk much about doing what you can afford to do. The Christian message says if you know and experience Jesus Christ, you're going to want to love and honor him with the very best that you have. Love does not count the costs or consider the limits. It just pours itself out upon the beloved.

You men, when you first fell in love, did you keep an itemized list of all the money you spent on your girl? You women, do you figure out your hourly wage for doing things for your man? You parents, do you keep a detailed record of all the expenses involved in rearing your child, and then when your child becomes an adult, do you demand a reimbursement? Do you do for the person that you love only what you can afford?

That woman from the street barged her way into someone else's home, interrupted someone else's dinner party, prostrated herself at someone else's feet, broke open a valuable jar of expensive ointment, and poured it all out on him. She couldn't afford to do any of that.

Why did she do all those things she couldn't "afford" to do?

Maybe she had listened to what Jesus had said.

Love is generous, she thought.

Love is kind, she thought.

Love wants the best for someone else, she thought.

She never thought about what she could "afford."

Everybody else thought she was rude, that she was an intruder, that she was an outsider, that she didn't belong. Everybody else thought she was wasteful, that she was stupid, that she was misguided.

Jesus thought she was a woman of faith.

He said her generous attitude was a product of her faith.

How about you?

Isn't it time you stopped doing for Jesus only what you can "afford?" Isn't it time to do something for Jesus out of love - do something for him out of gratitude - do something for him out of faith?

Although uninvited, that woman of the street made no apology. Kneeling at the feet of Jesus, she made no excuses. Filled with emotion, she made no pretense. As a matter of fact, there is no record that she ever

said anything. Confident in faith, and taking no notice of anyone or anything except the one she had come to praise, she proceeded.

There was ointment. It was extravagant.

There were tears. They were precious, too.

Ointment and tears mingled together on the feet of Jesus; they were the very best she had to give. And Jesus said she was a woman of faith!

Everybody else called her an intruder, an outsider, someone who didn't belong. Everybody else said she was too extravagant and wasteful.

Jesus said, "*her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little...*" [Luke 7:47]

What will Jesus say about you?

Will he say that you love much,
or will he think you love little?

Will he say that you give your very best,
or will he think you only give what you think you can
"afford"?

When you show up at his next dinner party,
what will Jesus say about you?