

Title: Grace and Gratitude

Text: Luke 7:36-50

Time: 11/20/2011 (a.m.)

Introduction

1. This week many of us will observe Thanksgiving. You will gather around a table of food with family and friends and probably at some point deal with the regret of consuming too much food.
2. Maybe you will take a moment and share things for which you are grateful like, "I thank God for my country"; "We thank you God, for the provisions we have," or "Thank God for living another year."
3. It is good to mix food and festivities with gratitude and thanksgiving; it is an honorable custom that we should celebrate.
4. Today, I want to take us to a table to which Jesus was invited, a table where we will find the deepest reason for our gratitude...grace. The extent of our gratitude comes in direct proportion to the awareness of our need for forgiveness (Greg Ogden).
5. In the Middle East hospitality is a big deal and we find that Simon the Pharisee fails to extend the kind of graciousness to a guest that would be expected.
6. Simon was a wealthy person and it was common for those of his social and economic status to have a home with an open courtyard accessible to the public.
7. Simon was proud to have Jesus at his house and would want the public to see how he treated Jesus; Jesus always drew a big crowd.
8. The woman we meet is part of the general public that has followed Jesus to the house of Simon.
9. We will see that Jesus is going to change the perspective of what was considered good and what was considered evil. The one who thinks he is good, is, in fact, revealed to be prideful and ungrateful. The one, who is considered immoral by worldly standards, is the embodiment of grace and gratitude.

1. Simon, the Pharisee

1. We quickly get insight into the rudeness of Simon, the Pharisee, who lacked the hospitality which would have been expected of a host in the Middle East.
2. Jesus said that Simon didn't do three things that he should have done:
 - Jesus says, "I came into your house. You did not give me water for my feet" (v. 44)Palastine is a dust bowl. It was customary to wear open sandals. So it was common courtesy for a host to either provide water for a guest to bathe his feet or instruct the servants to do so.

- Secondly, "You did not give me a kiss" (v. 45). Equals would kiss each other on the cheek. In a highly class conscious society as is the Middle East, an inferior would kiss the hand of the superior. A student would kiss the hand of a rabbi, a son would do the same with his father. No greeting was offered.
- Finally, a drop or two of scented olive oil on the head was a means of refreshment from one's travel. Jesus said to Simon, "You did not put oil on my head" (v. 46).

3. Simon's withholding of customary graciousness would be perceived as an obvious snub and Jesus would reveal them to be an act of self-righteousness.

4. The word Pharisee means "separated ones." Simon did not believe Jesus to be a prophet because if he were he could have discerned the immorality of the woman and therefore denied her attention.

5. Simon believed that by allowing this woman to touch Him, Jesus defiled Himself, which means her filth was transferred to Him.

6. Pharisees divided their world into greater and lesser. Simon built himself up by belittling those who did not pursue the higher life with the same zeal.

7. There is no greater enemy of gratitude, than pride or a subtle sense of superiority. Jonathan Edwards makes the distinction between spiritual pride and humility,

"Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others; whereas a humble saint is most jealous of himself, he is so suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The spiritually proud person is apt to find fault with other saints, that they are low in grace; and to be much in observance of how cold and dead they are; and being quick to discern and take notice of their deficiencies. But the eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home...that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts..."

8. Simon may have been one of those who thought that getting rid of Jesus would be doing God a favor.

2. The Woman

1. The contrast between Simon and the unnamed woman could not be more stark. Simon was withholding, the woman was lavish in her gracious display of affection.

2. The woman did everything that Simon refused to do. She did what the host in Middle Eastern society should have done.

- Simon provided no water, whereas the woman's tears became the water to cleanse Jesus feet. She noticed the lack of courtesy that Simon had offered Jesus, so she became the servant. The towel to wipe Jesus' feet was her hair. The crowning glory of a woman was her hair. But once she was married, her hair

would never be let down in public, only in the company of her husband. So overwhelmed was the woman with gratitude, she couldn't have cared less that others thought this act shameful.

- She offered the greeting of a kiss that Simon had withheld. It would have been improper for a woman to kiss Jesus on the cheek, so she does the unprecedented as a sign of indebtedness, she kisses his washed feet. She knew she was unworthy of his love and yet had already experienced it.
- Finally, she anoints him not with cheap olive oil that was very prevalent, but the expensive perfume that hung in an alabaster flask around her neck. If she was a prostitute, it was what she would use to be nicely scented for her clients.

3. The woman couldn't do enough for Jesus, she didn't care that she was making a scene in her public display of affection for Jesus.

4. Jesus accepts it all without embarrassment or apology. In fact, He is quite comfortable with her attention.

3. The Difference

1. With Jesus, the motive of the heart is everything. There is a difference between having Jesus at your table and hosting Him in your home.

2. Starting in verse 40, Jesus tells the story of two debtors, Luke 7:40-42: And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?"

3. Simon answered the question correctly but failed the test. Simon's one of those guys who got great grades but missed the education.

4. Now on the surface we might conclude that Jesus' message to Simon might be, "Simon, you are a righteous man and your sins are few. Thus very little is required to cover your debt, whereas as this woman has many sins and of course, she loves more, because she has been forgiven more."

5. Is that Jesus' message to Simon? No, I believe Jesus is saying, you hide behind your superficial moralism. You have taken the ethical high ground and look down upon this woman as if you have earned a special place in the heart of God. **Your sin is that you have no contrition or awareness of your need. You don't think you have much to be forgiven.**

6. Our outward behavior is not where we need to look, but shine the searchlight within and do a deeper inventory. As long as we measure ourselves on the basis of what we have not done, then we can say well, I haven't... [fill in the blank] Then we can easily grade a curve, find those more pitiable than we and feel quite good about ourselves.

7. Jesus asks an incredible question to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Do you think she exist just to justify your self-righteousness? Is she just being used by you to discredit Me? Do you see her brokenness? Do you even care about her or others like her?

8. What we see is an indication of the state of our heart and our ability to see our own need.

Conclusion

1. True gratitude flows from the awareness of our own need for grace.

2. "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, and now am found, was blind, but now I see", wrote John Newton, who said that he never wanted to forget that he was "once an infidel and libertine, a servant (or trader) of slaves in Africa.

3. The great Reformer Martin Luther was much like Simon. Luther thought righteousness was something of his own doing; he almost killed himself in his attempt to live a pure life.

4. It was only when Luther came to understand God's righteousness is the gift found in the grace and mercy of faith in Jesus Christ.

5. Luther describes, *"If you have a true faith that Christ is your savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God's heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This is to behold God in faith, that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart in which there is neither anger nor ungraciousness."*

6. Throughout Luther's life, once this discovery was made, he never ceased to marvel that God had accepted him, poor and wretched human being that he was. So the last words that Luther scribbled on his deathbed were, "We are only beggars; that is true."

7. The extent of our gratitude comes in direct proportion to the awareness of our need for forgiveness.