HOW DID SHE (AND YOU) GET IN HERE?
1. To learn about forgiveness
2. To live in forgiveness

Simon the Pharisee probably wondered: How did she get in here? It seems to be a bit of a surprise that the woman was there, but by that time it was too late. She had already planted herself behind Jesus and started in on his feet. It may have been rude or inconsiderate to tell her to stop or to leave at that point.

What was wrong with her? She was sinful woman from that town. We do not know what town this was, but either way, towns back then were not very large. Maybe a 100 or so at the most. Anyone who did some publicly sinful things would be known in their society in no time at all. Among the Jews this woman had earned her reputation in one way or another. I can recall a woman telling me that she felt that way when she returned to church. She had been excommunicated because of sexual immorality and divorce, but then after a few years she repented of her sin and wanted to come back to the church she came from. Everyone knew what she had done. She came anyway.

The woman in the lesson came because of Jesus. Most of the rabbis at Jesus’ time were cold and dry teachers of rules. They were more like lawyers. Jesus had earned for himself a different reputation. He spoke about God’s mercy. He expounded on the Word of God and told parables that explained God’s love and forgiveness. He had used his power to heal people and take care of them - people that the rest of society had ignored or thrown to the curb.

That is why we want Jesus to be at the center and focus of our worship. Jesus is the power in the baptismal font. God’s grace and forgiveness are given in the Lord’s Supper. It does not mean we will not preach the law. It does not mean that there will not be guilt or talk of sin. It does not mean there is no hell. But we want you to know that Jesus is the place for the guilty sinner to come. Yes, we start with a confession of sins, but we also have an absolution. Yes, you are condemned here, but you are also forgiven. Without forgiveness there is no reason to return. Jesus needs to be here at the front and center.

Even though nobody else in the house wanted her there, the sinful woman did not care what they thought. She was going to come and listen to Jesus because he had proven himself to be so forgiving and kind. She wanted to use this opportunity to show her love for him. She felt honored just to sit at his feet and wipe his feet with her hair, using her tears and some perfume to welcome him in. She was thankful to be there and humbled to be allowed to wash his dirty and road hardened feet.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all had such a focus and drive to be at worship? There was once a man in a congregation who was somewhat of a chauvinist and thought himself to be a genius. The thing was that he had no clue. He was not trying to be abrasive, it just came naturally. One couple left because of him. They could not stand to be in the same church with him because he irritated them so much. Another man was irritated with him, but he just passed it off and did not let it get to him. The pastor tried to explain to the other couple: When you are in a room with fellow sinners, you are going to be offended in one way or another. Do you really think there will not be other annoying people at your next church?

Love is willing to endure and suffer for the good of the other. Jesus did not abort the mission to the cross because people were being mean to him. He wanted to be with us eternally. His love was shown in his willingness to go through all of that in order to get to the cross and die under our sins - so that he could become us in the dirtiest sense of the word. The woman’s love of Jesus made her willing to endure the scowls of the host and his guests, just to
be with Jesus. That is a godly kind of love.

When the woman was in the presence of Jesus she couldn’t help but cry. While all of the rest thought it no big deal to be in the presence of Jesus, she did. How about you? What kind of tears were they? Were they tears of sorrow or tears of joy? Couldn’t they have been both? Jesus used the story of two men who owed a lender money. One owed more than the other, so the one who owed more would have more joy when the debt was forgiven.

Jesus used the picture as a picture of the woman. Why was she there crying? These were not only tears of sorrow but also tears of joy that Jesus, the gracious and forgiving one, had come. She was going through the dirty work of washing his feet, with her hair no less! Then she poured expensive ointment on his feet.

Jesus looked at her actions and he saw faith and love. She trusted that Jesus would welcome her in the house. She did not care how dirty this love would be or how much the ointment cost. Her love was unashamedly brave, willing to do the dirtiest thing, and to be generous and emotional. She was willing to risk the scowls of those who knew her, trusting that Jesus would forgive her. She was not saying: Here I am Jesus, a sinner. Deal with me! She was showing remorse over her sin and thankfulness over Jesus’ mercy. It took faith in Jesus for her to come to this household and be so bold as to sit at Jesus’ feet.

Her faith was rewarded. Jesus told her: Your sins have been forgiven. Note the confidence in those words. He did not say they could be forgiven or they might be forgiven. He said they are forgiven. No ifs, ands or buts about it. Her sins were gone from Jesus’ sight.

When you have led an openly immoral life and embarrassed yourself, it is more than difficult to go back to worship, especially when everyone knows what you have done. You have such a sense of failure and embarrassment and shame. You say to yourself: The moment I walk into church everyone is going to say, What is he doing here? And maybe you are right. But that did not stop the woman from entering Simon’s house, not as long as Jesus was there. She was glad to kiss his dirty feet.

But we get to do so much more here! We get to taste of his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins - not just some of your sins but all of them! You are forgiven for the sinner you are and the sins you have thought, spoken and done. That is given to say to you that you are God’s precious and holy child.

If the others want to hold grudges and remember your past, that is their problem not yours. If they want to question your motives, that is not on you – that is their problem. If Jesus’ was willing to accept this woman’s kisses on his feet and bold enough to forgive her in front of a hostile crowd, then why not you? If God would be so forgiving to bring David back after committing adultery and murder, what about you? Imagine trying to date someone when his or her family did not approve of you. What if that person was a very kind and loving person and wanted to be with you? What if you knew that person was the absolute perfect match for you? Wouldn’t you be willing to risk that rejection of the family out of love for the one in the family? Isn’t that the same of this woman’s love to Jesus?

Yet, as a side note, there is something else to be also said about this woman. She was not proud over what she had done. She was not demanding that Jesus and everyone in the room accept what she had done and let her keep on performing an obviously sinful life. There was forgiveness pronounced. There were tears shed. She kissed his feet!

That is a far cry from what you see sinners doing today. They are not crying over their sins. They just sit at the table and say: Here I am. Deal with it! They expect Jesus to accept them just because they have come to the table, as if they are doing Jesus a great favor just by showing up. That shows no repentance, faith, or love. How could you be so simple as to think that God has to forgive you just for showing up? Is taking the Lord’s Supper no more than that
of putting a quarter in a machine and getting your forgiveness?

Does that mean that there was no mercy for Simon? He had invited Jesus over. Jesus said in the story that both the one that owed much and the one that owed little were forgiven. Even those who think they have little to forgive, they are still forgiven. Jesus died for the Pharisee too.

But it makes you wonder if Simon believed it for his lovelessness and his thoughts of Jesus. Simon despised her for even showing her face in his house. He also despised Jesus for it. He questioned whether Jesus really was a prophet. If he was, he would have known who she was. Jesus knew exactly who she was. He showed that from his story. It was not a matter of knowledge. It was a matter of mercy. Simon did not get it. He probably did not like how this sinful woman also then exposed him to be the ungrateful sinner that he was.

I could come to church and focus on those who are not here. I could easily look with skepticism on those who only come on Mother’s Day or Easter and Christmas. A younger pastor was preaching a sermon for the confirmands, when in the middle of the sermon two of the confirmands started joking around. The younger pastor was not happy with what he saw from the children and their seeming disrespect for the Word. When he complained to his older compatriot the man said: Yes, well be glad they were here. Instead of focusing on the other people, think to yourself: It is an honor for me to be here and to be able to stand before the Lord. Who am I to receive the body and blood of the Lord for the forgiveness of my sins? Thank you Lord for welcoming me back even though you know what sins I have committed and what a sinner I am. Say to yourself: Lord, thank you for bringing us beggars back together and bringing us to repentance. Thank you for being merciful to all of us. In other words, focus on Jesus and his forgiveness more.

Instead of focusing on Simon, Simon the Pharisee was focused on the woman behind him. As a result he did not appreciate the fact that the merciful God was sitting at his table. He offered Jesus no love. This is what happens when you focus on the ch instead of Jesus.

Instead of focusing on the crowd, the woman was focused on Jesus’ feet. She felt honored and privileged just to sit at Jesus’ feet and listened to his words. This is what happens when you receive Jesus and his mercy offered in worship.

Jesus did not care what the Pharisee and his friends thought. He gave the woman forgiveness. Jesus did not say that her love saved her. He said that her faith saved her - her faith in Jesus. That is how we are all saved, through faith and not by how much we love. She believed Jesus was merciful and forgiving. She was right. As a result she received wonderful acceptance and recognition for her humble acts of love.

How will you approach Jesus? What will you look at when you come to church? What will you see? It affects your whole experience here. You can always find reasons to be disappointed. You can say: I didn’t like that song! The child behind me was crying. I felt no connection. Or you can receive the absolution in joy. You can still listen to God’s words of mercy in the songs. You can receive the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. You can leave in joy and happiness because Jesus is still the same. He still freely offers forgiveness to poor sinners like the woman and poor sinners like us. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill