

Jesus Loves Me, This I Know!

Proper 6, Year B – Luke 7:36-50

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 12, 2016

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee! Amen.

I woke up this morning before my alarm went off. That's not such an unusual thing for me on Sunday mornings, actually. Very often I will be rolling around well before the cock crows, as it were, with thoughts boiling through my head of our Sunday morning celebrations, our Sunday morning activities, my Sunday busy-ness. But this morning was different. This morning instead of waking up with a list of to-do's buzzing through my head, and before my docked phone started vibrating and playing a crescendoing version *Adoramus* by the boy choir of St. Philip's Church, East London, this morning I woke up with a different song.

The song that I woke up with this morning is stuck way, way deep in my brain. If memories are stored sequentially in there somewhere – and I'm told that it is *much* more complicated than that – it would be back in there sort of toward the beginning. I learned this song a long time ago in the basement of Greenville United Missionary Church. Mrs. Cole played the tinny, slightly off-tune piano that someone had donated as she led a handful of Sunday School kindergartners singing at the top of our lungs, "Jesus loves me, this I know!"

Now, if there were a bunch of kids here this morning, I would invite them up here to the crossing and we'd sit together and sing. But of course, unless I plan well in advance, what kids we have during the summer are up in the Atrium during the sermon, so I'll just have to sing with *you* guys. It's not hard, but if you need the words in front of you, it's number 218 in *Lift Every Voice and Sing* there in the pew racks. I'll start off, then you can join in whenever you catch on:

Jesus loves me, this I know!
 for the Bible tells me so.
 Little ones to him belong.
 We are weak, yet he is strong!
 Yes, Jesus loves me,
 yes, Jesus loves me,
 yes, Jesus loves me,
 the Bible tells me so.
 There, that wasn't so bad, was it?

Our story from the Luke's Gospel this morning is the story of someone that didn't know quite how to talk about how she loved Jesus. Maybe she crashed the party – maybe it was an outdoor affair so maybe she just walked up, or maybe she had to sneak by the doorkeeper. We really don't know how she got there, but Luke kind of gives us the distinct impression that at least the *host* of this shindig was not *particularly* pleased with her participation. You see, it was unusual enough for a woman to be a part of such a gathering, but this was "that sort of woman," *you* know what I mean? Nudge, nudge, wink, wink – a *sinner*! Actually, we have no idea what kind of sinner she was, though *plenty* of people have done *plenty* of speculating over the years. But this woman that apparently everyone *knew* was a sinner began to wash Jesus's feet with her tears, dry them with her hair, and anoint them with costly oil.

Unlike in John's version of this event, Jesus doesn't offer any deep theological rationale for this woman's behavior. He doesn't defend the expenditure of so lavish a gift. He doesn't talk about how the anointing is preparation for his burial. In this version, Jesus just tells a story:

It seems there were two fellows that owed money. One owed a whole year's wages, the other owed a month's worth. When the time came for repayment, neither of them could pay the

money back. The creditor, rather than taking his rightful legal remedies, canceled both debts. The end.

That's a pretty short story, even for Jesus. And then Jesus asked his host, the one who had been thinking that Jesus shouldn't be letting "that sort of woman" fondle his feet, Jesus asked, "Now, which one of those debtors do you think is going to love their creditor more?"

Sometimes, we righteous folk, reading this story with the same sort of righteous eyes as Jesus's host, might be tempted to think of ourselves as the ones who have a *smaller* debt to pay. We've kept our noses clean. We follow the rules and take care of our business. We haven't made it to the nightly news or the wrong part of the Gleaner. We've never even *taken* a mug shot.

But let me tell you, sitting right here this morning, we are *every one* of us the fellow who owed a *whole lot*. Because every time we have acted or *thought* out of vengeance (we like to call it "getting even" – though it seldom is), we have sinned. Every time we have lied (even little white fibs), every time we have gossiped, or gossiped about someone gossiping, or "oh, bless her heart," every time we have murdered someone's character, or "borrowed" something that isn't ours, or hit our kids, or ignored our parents, or cheated, or cut corners, or... well, *you* fill in the blanks, *every time*, we have sinned. We may be able to come up with really good reasons for doing every bit of it – but every time, we have sinned.

What's more, every time we have excluded *other* sinners from our table because they did not measure up to our own spotless standards, every time we have sent them away from the table empty, we have *sinned*. Every time we have insisted that our own feelings, our own understanding, our own experience is the reality by which the whole of creation is to be judged, we have *sinned*. Every time we have put our own comfort and pleasure ahead of the very survival of someone else – and let me assure you that every one of us is doing that every time we take a mouthful of whatever food we want, every time we step through the door of whatever home we have, every time we lay down on whatever bed we have made – let me assure you that every one of us is doing that right this minute sitting here in air-conditioned comfort – every time we have put our own comfort and pleasure ahead of the survival of someone else, we have sinned. And every time we have put our comfort or our pleasure or our preference or our *opinion*, before our obligation to yield *everything* to the living God of Creation with our whole mind and heart and soul, *every time*, we have sinned.

One sin piled on another, piled on another, piled on another, piled on another, and pretty soon, we are all of us "*that* kind of men and women," – you know what I mean? Nudge, nudge, wink, wink! *We* are sinners!

We are sinners who cannot possibly *earn* salvation. We are sinners who cannot even turn toward the Righteous One by our own efforts. We are *sinners*, every one of us, sinners who cannot hope for inclusion in the Kingdom of God except for one thing, and one thing only:

"Jesus loves me, this I know!"

So what do we do about that kind of love, the unmistakable, unfathomable, *unreasonable* love that has taken our *humongous* debt, and wiped the slate clean? I don't suppose that you should go out and find some costly ointment – John's version, you might remember, specifies that it was "oil of nard," though I don't think you're likely to find that at Rite-Aid. I don't suppose that you should go out with ointment to anoint the feet of particularly likely folks – I think that would likely be considered *assault* these days.

But we *can* respond to the love of Christ that has set us free from the debt of sin, by giving our *best*, not our second best, for *his* glory. We can respond to the love of Christ that has purchased our redemption with his own blood on Calvary, by putting the worship of the Creator of all that is ahead of our own comfort and pleasure, ahead of our own accumulation, *at least* ahead of our own recreation, and maybe doing that for our children as well. We can respond to the love of Christ that has taught us the very *meaning* of love, the love of Christ that has made us

spotless before the throne of God, the love of Christ that has given us life here and now – and life eternal – we can respond to *that* love, by telling everyone we know, by telling everyone that hasn't heard, by telling everyone, everyone, *everyone*, that “yes, Jesus loves *me!*”

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for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong.
We are weak, yet he is strong!
Yes, Jesus loves me,
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There, that isn't so hard, is it?