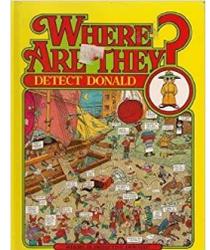




Luke 7:36-50 *One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing 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. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." ⁴⁸ And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

Have you ever read one of those seek and find books? Maybe you were fond of them when you were a kid or perhaps you read them to your own children, but I'm guessing many of you know what kind of books I'm talking about. You'll have two pages full of one giant picture, and you are given the task of finding things in that picture. "Where's Waldo?" is a well-known book series like that. When I was growing up there were the "I Spy" books that were very popular. And one of my favorite books growing up was a seek and find book in the same vein, it's called, "Where Are They? Detect Donald." Illustrated by Anthony Tallarico, each page is full of extremely chaotic illustrations, and you are given certain things to find.



Now when Jesus was teaching here on earth, He often made use of parables. The catechism definition for a parable is an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning." And they were pretty similar to a seek and find style of book because in these earthly stories, there are always a few characters to identify or a deeper spiritual meaning to find. And that's the case as well with our sermon text this morning. So in the spirit of my favorite seek and find book, the theme we'll be considering today is:

"Where Are They? Detect the Debtors"

- I. Find Simon – the ignorant debtor
- II. Find the woman – the repentant debtor
- III. Find yourself!

A man named Simon had invited Jesus to dinner. Not exactly a friend of Jesus though, He was a pharisee—the group of hypocritical men that were always seeking to trap Jesus. But Jesus never turned anyone down - not even a Pharisee - so He entered Simon's house and took His place at the table. In

those days, mealtime was a bit different than ours today. For one thing, people lay down to eat; they reclined on low couches with their heads toward the table and their feet away from it, leaning on their left elbow as they ate. That seems rather strange to us, but it was completely natural to them. Another custom that might seem strange - outside visitors frequently would stop by for a few minutes' conversation while the meal was going on. During meals you just had an open door policy, and this was completely natural to them. But what happened in our text was very uncommon, and quite shocking to everyone except for Jesus.

There was a woman who walked in and stood at Jesus' feet weeping. Everyone knew her to be a woman that had fallen into some very public sin, perhaps she'd been caught in adultery or had a child out of wedlock. The respectable people around the table were shocked that she would be there, but even more so once she started crying on Jesus' feet and drying them with her hair. They couldn't believe it! But Jesus never moved, even while an obvious sinner proceeded to kiss His feet and anoint them with an expensive perfume.

Simon the Pharisee, the host of this meal, he was outraged, but he didn't say so out loud. He thought to himself, ***"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."*** Of course Jesus did know that, and He knew Simon's thoughts as well. He turned to him and said, ***"Simon, I have something to say to you."*** So he said, ***"Teacher, say it."*** So Jesus proceeded to tell him the Parable of the Two Debtors.

Two men owed money to the same moneylender; one man 50 denarii, the other 500. Now a denarius was a day's wages for a working man—rather than trying to figure out the conversion rate and inflation or anything like that, just think of the debt in terms of time. One fella owed the moneylender about two months of work, the other owed about two years of work. That's a lot of money! So there was quite a difference in the size of the debts owed by these two men in the parable. However, they did have one thing in common: regardless of the size of their debts, neither of them could pay it off.

If you've ever faced a financial deadline with no idea how you were going to pay the bill, maybe you can appreciate their misery—days of worry, nights of tossing and turning, dreading the coming day of reckoning. At last the day arrives, and both men go penniless to the moneylender to learn their fates. And then something astonishing happens, something they never imagined—out of the blue, the moneylender decides to cancel their debts completely; he credits them with paying off the entire amount! Suddenly, both men found themselves free and clear, and all on account of the kindness and good will of their creditor. Now comes the point of the parable: Tell me therefore, Jesus asked the Pharisee, ***"which of them will love him more?"*** ***Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."*** ***And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."***

"Well, that was a nice little story," Simon may have thought to himself, "but what's it got to do with this disreputable woman disrupting my dinner party?" So Jesus explained it to him. He challenged him, in effect, to play a little game of seek and find: **Detect the Debtors**. Simon himself was represented by a character in the parable, as was the woman. And if we look close enough, I think we'll find that each of us is somewhere in that picture, too! ***"Where Are They? Detect the Debtors."***

Let's find Simon first, because he's an easy one to spot. He's the debtor who had less debt to forgive. Jesus cast him in that role because that's how Simon saw himself as compared with the woman. After all, he was an upstanding member of the community, very religious, in the synagogue every Sabbath, paid his taxes, and also made his prescribed tithes to the church. Certainly, he was far above that wicked woman in terms of righteousness—or so he thought! But remember, in the parable, both debtors were

bankrupt! Neither of them had the means with which to pay their debt. By the way, in those days they threw you in prison when you couldn't pay your debts; and it didn't matter how much you owed—one dollar or a million dollars, the punishment was the same. Similarly, the punishment for sin is the same for every sinner—eternal death. Simon's problem was that he didn't realize how much he owed. The Bible says, **"The soul that sins shall die."** (Ezekiel 18:20) It also says, **"Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."** (James 2:10)

Simon the Pharisee was a sinner ignoring his own sinfulness and ignoring his need for a Savior. And the evidence for this was clear, said Jesus. Like the man in the parable, **"he loved little."** When the Lord Jesus came to his house, Simon didn't show love for him, actually, he wasn't even very polite! For instance, it was common courtesy in those days for a host to greet his guests with a kiss on the cheek as they arrived; but, Jesus said, You gave me no kiss. Normally a servant would appear to wash the feet of the guests before dinner; But Simon, **"You gave me no water for my feet,"** Jesus says. For special guests, a few drops of scented oil would be placed on the forehead as a gesture of welcome; and Jesus says, **"You did not anoint my head with oil."** If Simon the Pharisee had known how much sin he actually needed forgiveness for, he certainly wouldn't have omitted these polite customs. But he didn't know. His self-righteous nose was so high in the air that he couldn't see his own sin. This is what we read about in the sermon last week, **"The deceptiveness of sin."** Oftentimes, we don't realize how bad our sin is. And Simon's lack of love for Jesus proved that he had fallen for sin's deceit. *He*, not the woman, was the worst kind of sinner: an unrepentant one, teetering on the brink of hell!

Can you find yourself in this picture? All too often, I'm afraid, we too are like the debtor who loved little. So often we underestimate how far in debt to sin we've become. We explain, we rationalize, we minimize our responsibility for our sin. Does it ever happen in our life that, instead of kissing Jesus' feet in repentance over our sin, we spit in His face by nonchalantly continuing to do what we know is wrong? Do we, like Simon, despise the Lord Jesus? Have we ignored the preaching of His Word, and scorned His gift of forgiveness by frequently missing the Lord's Supper? Have we been guilty, like Simon, of looking down self-righteous noses at those of our neighbors who are "less holy" than we are?

You begin to feel it, don't you? The conviction that your sins are great, and that the punishment for your sin is indeed dreadful? That's a good realization to come to, because there is good news in our text today as well.

"Where Are They? Detect the Debtors." We found Simon, but what about the other one? The one who was forgiven a debt not of two months of work but two years of work? Of course with this character Jesus was referring to the sinful woman at His feet.

That woman had no illusions about her own sinfulness—she knew how low she had fallen and was very aware of the danger that sin posed to her eternal soul. Yes, she knew all about her sin—but she also knew about HER SAVIOR. Maybe she had heard Jesus speak somewhere, or perhaps she had only heard a rumor about Him: "The Messiah has arrived!" someone may have whispered. Maybe someone pointed her to Him, "His name is Jesus of Nazareth, and He'll forgive the sins of anyone who comes to Him!" However it happened, the Holy Spirit had worked faith in this woman's heart. She knew that Jesus was the One who could lift the heavy burden of guilt off her sinful shoulders, and so there wasn't anything that could keep her away from Him. And so she stepped into that room where her social status said that she didn't belong, and she made a spectacle of love for her Savior. She knew very well that Jesus was the creditor who could and would cancel her huge debt of sin.

She wasn't wrong about that, either. Jesus once said, ***"Whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*** (John 6:37) While Simon and his other guests looked down their noses at her in disgust, Jesus looked upon her with the loving compassion of God. He granted her deepest desire. He said to her, ***"Your sins are forgiven... go in peace."***

What a wonderful blessing Jesus gives—to suddenly be completely released from the weight of sin! The woman must have felt the same way that that man did in the parable—the one who had the greatest debt. Sudden release! Sudden freedom! Sudden salvation from certain ruin! Her gratitude for Jesus' forgiveness was plain for all to see. There was no pride to be seen as she knelt at Jesus' feet and washed them with her tears. There was no self-righteousness in the way she kissed His feet and anointed them with oil. There was only one thing—love for her Lord and Savior. This love was the *evidence* of her faith. Of the two characters in the parable, she was the one who was forgiven much, and therefore loved much.

Now did I say, "two characters"? Actually, there are three. Because you are in there, too! You've felt the same conviction of sin that that woman felt. You, in your life, have felt the same desperate longing for forgiveness. And don't ever be afraid to bring those sins to God. You too can come to Jesus today and lay all your sins at the foot of his cross. He is waiting for you with full forgiveness for each of your transgressions! When you're driven to cry out with Paul, ***"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"*** (Romans 7:24)—that's when the sweet words of Jesus are the most comforting thing on earth: ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*** (Matthew 11:28-30)

If we find ourselves in this parable, let it be as the ones who were forgiven much and loved much. Let us come to our Savior's feet, humbly confessing our sin; not boasting of our own accomplishments but seeking the forgiveness only His grace can provide. We won't leave that meeting empty-handed. Are your sins many? So were that woman's, and she wasn't turned away! ***"Where sin increased,"*** our Lord says, ***"grace abounded all the more."*** (Romans 5:20) It was for that sinful woman that Jesus walked the way of the cross. It was for you that He bore the Roman whip and crown of thorns. It was for me that He suffered the wounds of nail and spear. Our sins have all been atoned for by Jesus; and our debt, though great and insurmountable, is totally cancelled. We have been forgiven much, and so brothers and sisters, with our lives let's show the world that we can love much because of it.

Now it is Jesus' final words of our text that make this section an especially comforting one. A famous Lutheran Theologian was once asked what he most wanted in life. He replied, ***"For myself, I want no more than what Christ gave to that sinful woman—the words, 'Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'"*** If that sounds as good to you as it does to me, well then we've found everyone in this picture. By the grace of God, we've found ourselves here, and we also found that our eternal future is secure in Christ Jesus! ***"Go in peace."*** Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

August 23, 2020

Trinity 11