

## COMMEMORATION OF MARY MAGDALENE

Luke 7:36-50

Love is interest on debts forgiven.

The Messiah has come. Here He is, for all to welcome Him. Here He is, long promised and now on the scene. The Messiah has come, but no one wants to anoint Him. Pump Him with questions? Sure. Tell Him how to run heaven? You betcha. Criticize His words and actions? Not a problem. Yet anoint Him? No, there's no line for that.

Do you remember what Messiah means? It means the same thing as Christ. Messiah is Hebrew. Christ is Greek. Both mean "Anointed One." To be anointed is to be chosen, set aside for a task. Here is the One anointed to save. Here is the Messiah, but no one is running with oil. Even His own disciples have their doubts. There is no bold prophet like Samuel to pour oil on the head of this Son of David. There is no courageous priest like Jehoiada to announce the reign of God's long-hidden Son. Here is the Messiah, and so what.

Have things changed? Here's the Messiah, and so what? Many are bored with Him. Even more could care less. The better portion of the world has crafted their own messiahs in their own image, unsatisfied or impatient with this one. And let's be honest: our zeal also has fizzled with time. Jesus is here, Ederer is fixed, the air is on, but still no parade. Here's the Messiah, and yawn.

The Pharisees invited Him to dinner and He was supposed to be impressed, even honored. It'd be nice to be hard on them, but then we'd have to be hard on ourselves. How often don't we expect Him to be impressed with our presence? How often don't we think He should be flattered that we toss Him once a month or more? Forget what a friend we have in Jesus. How often don't we expect Him to be grateful for what a friend He has in us? We've pulled up a seat at the Pharisees table, put on our conceited grin, and supposed the Messiah should be just thrilled that we've deigned to receive Him. Aren't we just swell?

And then some sinner comes and is overwhelmed that Jesus would stoop to his or her level, and we are stunned. It's just a worship service, after all, a hymn, a sermon, a piece of bread and drop of wine: nothing to get worked up over. What's wrong with them? And instead of taking our place at His feet, we're too busy asking that question, or, even worse, making that statement.

"If this man were a prophet..." You've asked it. Perhaps you don't know it, but you have. When His plans have been greater than your plans, and His wisdom wiser than your wisdom, you've wondered, "If this man were a prophet..." When another you've deemed less worthy has prospered as you've suffered, you've wondered, "If this man were a prophet..." When some unfortunate event has happened in your life, or in the life of another, you've fumed, "If this man were a prophet..." When He's expected you to offer what you've received from Him, whether forgiveness or aid, you've whined, "If this man were a prophet..." You've said it more than you realize, and so have I, because there is a little Pharisee in all of us who'd prefer to put our own messiah together than to receive the One God has chosen for us. "If this man were a prophet..."

The sinful woman didn't have time to ask questions or make statements. She had no time for advice or second-guesses. The sinful woman had sin, and she saw the Savior, and she ran to anoint Him. Tears of repentance streamed from eyes that had seen her only chance at a second shot. Everything she had became nothing. All she was she offered to Him, just as He would offer all He was for her on the cross. If these Pharisees and you Lutherans wouldn't anoint Him, she would. She had nothing fancy—only perfume, like that with which the women would go to anoint His crucified carcass—but what she did have, she wanted to be His. She would not dare to touch His head—like John the Baptist, was unworthy even of His feet—but she would dare to wash them with her weeping and to dry them with the hair on her bowed head. She was completely His, if He would have her, and, praise God, He would.

When was the last time you came before Him that way? When was the last time you offered what was yours to Him, not begrudgingly, but as if it were His greatest kindness to let you do so and to pretend your nothing was something worth receiving? When was the last time you approached His Body and Blood, let alone His feet, with tears of repentance and an overwhelming sense of unworthiness? Who are you that He should receive you? Who am I?

He is the Messiah, and if no one else will anoint Him, the sinful will, and He will have it no other way, for the sinful are those He's come to save. The self-fulfilled smiles of the self-righteous have no place at His table. No, He's saved seats for the sick, the suffering, the sorrowful, those who have looked into the mirror and seen who they really are and don't want it.

You're no better than this woman. No, you're worse, because you didn't come today with an alabaster jar, to bathe His feet with tears and dry them with the towel of your hair. You've not run to Him as your only hope. You had next week or whatever you had to fall back on, but, if you're like me, you didn't have a heart nearly as broken and contrite as this sinful woman. And if

you think I'm wrong, that's fine. You'll find good company with those who despised the sorry display this woman set forth in our Gospel.

Tradition says this sinful woman is Mary Magdalene. Luther himself assumes that is the case. I would love to believe it is, but I can't say so with certainty. In fact, I doubt that it is. But there is a reason that this is the historic text for the commemoration of Mary Magdalene, the one out of whom our Lord cast seven demons. She was a sinful woman who took hold of her Savior and never let go. The interest on the debt forgiven her was a love that followed the Messiah all the way to the foot of the cross and His grave. Of all in the world, she is one of the few who saw Him die and witnessed His resurrection. And she, who was by all accounts least in the eyes of the world, was graced to be counted worthy to be the first to proclaim the glad Easter tidings.

You stink. I stink. Whether we want to admit it or not, it's true. Even perfume will do us little good, but don't toss it out. We can use it to anoint the feet of our Savior. There is hope for us, and His name is Jesus. Mary Magdalene is living proof of that.

There's a reason I named my daughter what I did. It is a reminder to her, and to Mom and Dad, that there is always a place at the Savior's feet for those who know they don't belong to be there. The sinful must anoint the Messiah, because no one else will, and He would have no one else do it. There's always forgiveness for the debts of the desperate.

You've been forgiven much. Whether you came here today to have your debts cancelled or not, they have been cancelled. Christ's feet, anointed by this sinful woman, have been pierced for your transgressions. Christ's feet, anointed by this sinful woman, which Mary Magdalene in stubborn devotion came to anoint on Easter Sunday, have walked out of death's womb to give you new birth into a living hope. "Your sins are forgiven," Jesus says. "Go in peace," He bids. And forgiveness is always the headwaters of love.

Magdalene means fortress. This Messiah is your fortress. Perhaps no one else will anoint Him, but sinner's tears make the best oil. There's no time for questions or statements, for advice or second-guesses. There is only time to run to Him, and then to rejoice that He receives you. There may not be a seat at the table of the self-righteous for such people, but Jesus will pull up a chair. Praise God, He will have you. Have Him. But beware: love is the interest on debt forgiven. The Messiah is here. What are you waiting for? You don't have to impress Him. Just let His mercy impress you. Amen.