***Our Need***

**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.”

Luke 7:41   “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.”

Let’s pray.

This famous story in Luke 7 is about a sinful woman being forgiven. In the story, she weeps over her sins and anoints Jesus’ feet with an alabaster flask of ointment of very high value. The religious men in the room judged her. They didn’t understand what was happening.

Jesus, however used the opportunity to demonstrate the importance of this woman’s tears. Her tears were external representations of something profound that was changing in her heart and soul. She had reached a point of despair and brokenness. She had wept over her sins and her inadequacies and she knew how much she needed Jesus. She loved him, and the hope that he offered her.

To this woman, her sins were great in her own eyes. Her need of Jesus was also great. To the religious men in that room, they considered their sins small and their need for Jesus even smaller.

Jesus closes the account of this woman with these words:, “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.”

One of the greatest tools we can have in life is to better understand our own weaknesses, and deficiencies. ***Understanding our need*** and our inadequacies gives us the opportunity to grow and to change. To admit we don’t have it all together, is to admit that we in and of ourselves are not enough.

Living in pride, on the other hand, as the religious leaders did, is to live in self-denial. And as much as we’d all like to ***not identify*** with these religious leaders, I believe that we are prone to live life the way they did.

Why is it that we all lean this direction? Why aren’t we more disposed to follow this woman’s humble example, see our great need of Jesus and expose our utter helplessness?

I think it is obvious that the main reason we don’t do that is because we all know people like these religious leaders. This woman is not the first person to be ridiculed for being vulnerable, nor is she the last.

People we trust can be very heartless when we open up, inflicting deeper wounds than even they understand. We see this not just in the world, but sometimes even more so in the church.

This particular account shows us that there are religious leaders present. The men who were supposed to demonstrate a godly example. Nevertheless, it is these leaders that are shaming this woman. Who are shaking their heads in disbelief. They have no compassion. They only see her sins. They forget she is made in God’s image and that if it were not for the grace of God, they would find themselves in the exact same situation.

I mention this, to point out that everyone of us can be guilty of this type of shaming and behavior. Religious leader, solid Christian, missionaries, lay people, we all are susceptible to judging others and demonstrating a lack of empathy.

In this passage, Jesus elevates the woman who is vulnerable. He sets her up as an example of what we should all strive to be. Like her, we should all be people who are willing to be vulnerable, repentant and aware of our inadequacies.

And in contrast, he condemns those who in their self-righteousness condemn the broken woman.

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Many of you might remember that my family and I served as missionaries in South America. Wherever we lived in South America, we had tall, thick walls around our home, a guard in the neighborhood, an alarm system, cameras and an electric fence to keep those who wished us harm, out of our home. It may seem like an exaggeration, but even with all these measures, thieves still broke into places like that and being robbed was a regular part of life.

Now, if you walked up to our house, you wouldn’t have been put off by our security, in fact you probably wouldn’t have noticed. The walls were beautiful, the iron gates were stylish, but make no mistake, their main purpose was to keep people out.

Though we might not have that level of security in our homes here in Washington, there is little question in my mind as to whether or not we bring that level of security to our personal lives and hearts.

We build up emotional barriers and walls, we paint them with pretty facades and we act like we have it all together. We rarely give people access to go behind the shell of who we are, out of fear.

We fear what people will say (like those horrible religious leaders did), or we fear what people will think of us.

So we protect ourselves by putting up walls. We make ourselves look good on the outside and though we are struggling within, we put off an air of perfection. We exhibit our best self, and we stick to talking about surface level things. We maintain superficial relationships with those around us out of a sense of self-preservation.

And the worst part of this is that we can begin to believe that we are the people we show to other people. The facade we paint for others, we begin to adopt as if we really were all put together***.***

In living this way, we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are less sinful, less needy than others. ***1 John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”***

In the same way, if we live as though we have our lives altogether, especially around other people who are there to help us, we deceive ourselves.

Though this is a women’s ministry event, it might be helpful to use an example that men tend to struggle with.

I have heard, that apparently there are some commonly held beliefs that men hold fast to. Legend has it that they are passed on from generation to generation. A few of those commonly held beliefs are as follows:

1) Men, never get lost, and furthermore, they don’t need to ask for directions.

2) When building something, we men do not need instructions.

3) We men all think we can do our own plumbing and home repairs.

This is partially a joke, but in another real sense, those of you women that know what I’m talking about, can see how this sort of “denial” can cause some real problems. Because as we all know, men can be stubborn (or so I’ve been told) and we can often think that we can do just about anything we put our minds to. Now, you could probably all tell us some really good horror stories of how this manly pride and denial has played out in your households, but there might be more stories than we have time for.

Denial like this can be harmful in simple tangible ways. It can affect house repairs and can make for poorly built Ikea furniture with left over screws and hardware. These are simple things, that usually don’t cause too big of a problem in our lives overall.

***But denial can be really serious as well.***

None of us would think it wise to rush to the doctor with a gaping wound, and when asked what the problem is, cover it up and deny you have an issue. “Oh, hello Doctor, we’re fine….in fact we’re doing really well!” What sense is there in that? How ridiculous!

Well, in a real and very serious sense, we act just like this when we hide our internal struggles and pain. We cover up our hidden gaping wounds of brokenness, grief, despair and depression. We hide our helplessness and pain. We smile on the outside while we are crushed and defeated on the inside.

In the same way that ignoring an external gaping wound would be absolutely absurd, so is ignoring and hiding an internal gaping wound.

The Bible teaches us to prize humility. Wisdom dictates that to live as Jesus called us to, we must share our burdens, expose our problems, and humbly ask for help when we are drowning in sorrow and pain.

We all have issues, so ***who*** do we think we are fooling? And in our fooling ***who*** are we really hurting?

**We hurt ourselves, but we also hurt others.**

You see, God created us to live in community as one body. As individuals, we are ***incomplete***. As a body, we are helped by our other members, and we also help other members.

Paul said, in the same way “the eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable… in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” (**1 Cor. 12**)

Living a life where you think you are self-sufficient, is to live in denial. Paul explicitly states here that we would be foolish to think we don’t need others. We cannot be independent people. Our burdens are meant to be shared. They are meant to be carried together. At the end of 1 Cor. 12, Paul says, “*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it*.”

Have you ever considered how our security walls and barriers have been a deterrent toward suffering with others? Are you keeping people at arm’s length, for your protection? Are you suffering with those who suffer, and allowing others to suffer with you? Or are you living life as a self-sufficient being? Denying your need for others?

**What does the Scripture say?**

In Isaiah 63, we see a passage that says the following: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me (speaking of Jesus), because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

Later we read that this same Jesus helps the brokenhearted. He proclaims freedom to the captives, he comes “to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful ***headdress instead of ashes***, the oil of ***gladness*** instead of ***mourning***, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

If you look over that passage again carefully, you will see that the good news that Jesus was bringing was directed to a specific demographic of people. It is not the people who are self-sufficient, rich in spirit, well established and self-righteous. Rather, Jesus the Messiah went to help the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, those who are crushed and afflicted. Those who grieve, those who are trampled down, lonely, in despair, those who feel forgotten, those who are in ashes and sackcloth.

There is a real sense here that Jesus expects to find us broken. How could we not be broken?! We live in a broken world, full of pain, sin and suffering. This is not our home. We are exiles. We struggle with our sin, with our inadequacies, with our failures.

Jesus doesn’t come to us **once we have overcome these things**, he comes to us ***while*** we are ***in them***.

***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”***

In the **midst** of our pain. He comes to give us hope and grace IN our struggle.

**Death and Despair**

In my life, I have experienced the death of many close loved ones. The most recent death being my sister Keila, whose sudden and unexpected death in February of last year at only 43 years of age. It hit our family very hard.

Some of the deepest sorrow we face on earth revolves around death. It is supposed to hurt because God did not create us for death. He created us for life.

But I mention this because at these funerals, as is typical in any funeral, or moment of mourning or grief we receive a lot of well-intentioned comments that were very empty. All of you must know what I mean. You know, “Don’t worry, she is in heaven now” or “God works all things together for good….”

The hope behind these well-intentioned comments, is to help the person who is grieving. But I think our view of helping is skewed, and perhaps not very Biblical.

Dr. Kelly Kapic, in his book called, *Embodied Hope*, writes convincingly that often times the church doesn’t know how to handle grief well. We Christians want to help solve and remove the pain. But we need to learn how to do this better.

“We will need to learn a fresh what it means to point people to Jesus and his kingdom, ***but not as a slogan***, ***not as a quick fix, not as a superficial answer***. We must point to the profound and redemptive ***compassion*** of Jesus, the son of God, who healed the sick and entered into genuine human suffering and even death by crucifixion. Kapic, 26.

He goes on to say that “the church denies the power of the gospel when it **trivializes** **the grief and belittles physical pain**, over-spiritualizing our existence in such a way as to make a mockery of the Creator Lord….Biblical faith is not meant to provide an escape form our physical pain or to belittle the darkness of depression and death, but rather invites us to discover hope and grace amid our struggle.” Kapic, 41.

It seems that too often we Christians want to limit mourning to quick theological one-liners and a sometimes less-than-sincere offer to pray. We seek to help people, but often we want them to quickly overcome their pain and get back on track with life, rather than lament with them in their pain. We live in a fast-paced world, and it is hard for us to slow down. To grieve and mourn with others.

But Kapic explains “Hope comes to us not by denying or downplaying our pain, but by acknowledging it before the God who abounds with compassion.” Kapic, 40.

If we look throughout Scripture, we see how godly men and women lamented. How they grieved and wept. Jesus himself was a man of sorrows. David wept at the loss of his son.

When we make the Christian life a sorrowless life, and deny the appearance of brokenness, suffering and despair, we make being a Christian, about having a perfect life.

But this is to betray the message of the gospel. We must not belittle our sins, or our sorrow, or our needs. Otherwise, we make Jesus’ sacrifice appear insignificant.

We must start looking at suffering more biblically. We must see that God has made us multi-dimensional. We don’t just rejoice all the time. We grieve. We aren’t happy all the time. We suffer.

None of us like the way suffering feels, but that is mostly compounded by the fact that we add guilt and shame to suffering. We, like the religious leaders in Luke 7, too often have judged the person who is suffering. We have the preconceived idea that grief and sorrow and mourning is somehow wrong. That a Christian must smile all the time.

But Sisters in Christ, you are not called to wear a perfect smile, or live a perfect life in this world. Your outward appearance is not God’s focus. He wants your heart. Your beauty is not found in your behavior or your obedience. Your beauty is on display when you cling to Christ. When you show the watching world and church how you embrace Christ and his body when hardship hits you down.

While we cannot explain *WHY* he foreordained all that comes to pass, especially when those things come to pass in such heartbreaking ways, we know that he wants us to run to him like a baby chick runs to the protection of its mother’s wings.

You are called to cling to Christ. The discover him in the midst of sorrow. In the valleys of the shadow of death and in the darkest moments of life.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

In conclusion, this evening I want to encourage you to follow the example of this humble woman, who wept and was commended. Jesus comes to those who need him. The poor, the naked and the blind. To those who are helpless and powerless. He comes, and as a King who is greater than all other kings, he frees us from captivity, from sorrow and brokenness. He binds us and makes us beautiful in him.

Revelations reminds us that it is foolish to think we are sufficient. Jesus says “you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, **and white garments so that you may clothe yourself** and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

Sisters in Christ, your beauty does not come from pulling yourself out of the ashes, but seeing that you are in the ashes of grief and sorry, and clinging to Christ. Being clothed in his righteousness and hope.

Let’s pray.