



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

**Close Encounters with Jesus:
The Woman with the Alabaster Jar
Luke 7:36-50
By Dr. Matt Hook**

[Peanuts Baseball game]: Lucy, the outfielder, misses an easy fly ball. Charlie Brown leaves the pitcher's mound to talk to her, asking her what happened. Lucy replies "The past got in my eyes." ☺ The past got in my eyes...If only that were limited to baseball! How much of your life is dominated by your past?

Hear this encounter with Jesus and the response of people whose past had dominated their eyesight...It comes just after Jesus healed the centurion's servant, raised the widow's son from death, spoken with John the Baptist's followers...

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-- that she is a sinner." 40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." 48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Don't you know everybody must have wanted Jesus over for dinner? The man was the talk of the town—healing the leper, giving sight to the blind, raising the widow's son right out of his coffin. He had invitations to one social gathering after another, Simon the Pharisee's dinner among them. *36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.* As was custom, they ate *reclining* at a table on their left side, so they could eat with their right hand. (It saved on having to rent chairs).

37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,” A woman who lived a sinful life. Like the Gerasene Demoniac, this woman didn't have a name, either. Considering the whole town knew her reputation, it's odd they didn't also know her name. She was a prostitute, and all that goes along with it. But whatever her history, she stayed well-informed about the late-breaking news of the day. Luke tells us “*She learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house.*” Often times, the poor people were allowed to visit public banquets to snatch up the leftovers.

She didn't come empty-handed. She came with her most precious gift—an alabaster jar of perfume (37). Alabaster was a soft stone, imported from Egypt into Palestine, especially popular for perfume and ointments. It was light and creamy, usually lined with veins. It was likely a palm-sized, common flask. She wasn't wearing the perfume, drawing attention to herself with its scent. She was carrying it in this small alabaster vial.

38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Jesus' gaze reflected compassion, not judgment. His words were kind, not cruel. She was drawn to him, closer and closer, until she stood right behind him. And that's when the tears began to flow, from a well so deep inside her, these murky waters had never seen the light of day, slipping down her cheek, to Jesus' feet.

They left her vulnerable, exposed, repentant, and not caring who saw her or what they thought of her. She didn't try to stop. She couldn't. I think they were tears of sorrow and joy mixed. She KNEW Jesus understood her, forgave her, loved her. He didn't brush off the tears. He didn't send her away. He allowed it. He accepted her worship. Her body soon followed her tears, as she dropped to her knees only inches from the feet of her Savior.

Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. (38). Her hair would have been bound up, according to social custom. Imagine a Middle Eastern woman even today letting down her hair in public. It was considered so bold, so provocative, so abhorrent it was grounds for divorce. But she was already outcast. She belonged to NO ONE. Except perhaps, this man Jesus.

Overcome, her thoughts surely spinning, He received her adoration. She become more overcome, and let her mouth follow the same path her fingers had taken and lightly touched His feet with her lips, kissing them.

It was custom to touch a drop of the perfumed ointment to His head. But she had lost her restraint. Extravagantly, yet with purpose, she poured the contents of her precious alabaster jar over his feet.

The same perfume she used to seduce men was poured out—every priceless drop—to honor the one man who would never use her. Can you picture the party scene in this moment?

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-- that she is a sinner." Good ole Simon didn't miss a trick. He kept an eye on everything that was said and done around Jesus: and here's this woman making a total idiot of herself and Jesus.

Now Simon may have been sympathetic to Jesus and his ministry. As a Pharisee, it was his sincere desire to observe the Law of God. He gave his life to making the effort, even when other Jews didn't. But he was completely unsympathetic toward this woman.

So Jesus drew Simon in. And he tells a parable... It's actually a parable I can understand! Two men each get their debt canceled. "Which guy is more grateful?" (It's a no brainer.) Simon the host gets it: "*The one with the bigger debt canceled.*" (43).

Then Jesus asks him, "*Do you see this woman?*" (44) Simon had only seen her for WHAT she was, not WHO she was. There are so many people I DON'T see. There are so many people I tell myself I don't see...when Jesus notices every detail and responds. You may be here "anonymously," but Jesus notices every detail of you, and He responds. But unless we are in some kind of interaction with Him, I believe we miss His response.

Then, by pointing out things she did right and the things Simon *should* have done, Jesus managed to affirm her and admonish him at the same time, without stripping either one of dignity.

Jesus does acknowledge her many sins. That's simply the reality of her situation, and ours, too. But he doesn't CONDEMN her for her many sins. Perhaps she had already given up her life of sin. Her heart was in plain view as she knelt at His feet. Without a word, she expressed her forgiveness and repentance in her encounter with

Jesus.

So Jesus says, 47 *“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”* Hear this: Those who have lived can never see what those who have died and now live can see. (again) I’ll bet, when I sit in church and feel disconnected or just plain bored, and out of tune with the music, let alone God, it’s easy to blame lots of stuff, from a bad night’s sleep to an argument with my wife. But the truth probably is I’m not willing to confess my sins, so that true worship can begin. I *forget* how much I’ve already been forgiven so my gratitude can flow. Those who have lived can never see what those who have died and now live can see.

48 *Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”* Simon wasn’t included in this one. Catch this: Forgiveness is always personal with Jesus. He died for the sins of the whole world, but forgiveness comes to each of us, individually, when we demonstrate our readiness to accept it. Of course the people were aghast: “He has some nerve! Who does he think he is, forgiving her sins!”

50 *Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”* It wasn’t her LOVE that saved her. It was her FAITH in his power to forgive her. It was her FAITH in His steadfast love for her. Faith is putting her belief into actions, not just words.

“...go in peace.” Peace. What everyone hopes for, prays for, longs for. The Amplified Bible phrases peace as “the freedom from all the distresses that are experienced as the result of sin]. Peace comes to those who are willing to move away from sin and towards the Prince of Peace, until His peace becomes their own.

Why is it so hard? We know People will talk, no matter what we do. They talked when she was in sin, they talked when she sacrificed herself in worship, they talked when Jesus forgave her sin.

We know Jesus can discern our thoughts and intentions. Words do have great value, but when you’re talking to Jesus directly, you can hear better when you’re listening in silence and worshiping...not talking. The prophet Habakkuk said *“The Lord is in his holy temple...let all the earth be silent before him.”* 2:20.

Why is it so hard to encounter and worship Jesus?

I think there are 3 reasons the Pharisee found it hard:

1. This Jesus isn’t what I expected from God.
2. Jesus doesn’t play by my rules.
3. I have no need: I want no forgiveness.

If *you’re* not ready to worship Him, what’s your reason today?

Is it a good excuse, or a poor one?

These I’ve named are poor, because each fails to deal with the reality that Jesus Christ is God. HE IS the reality, no matter what I expected. He makes the rules. He supplies my every need, including, when I really face up to it, my basic need of forgiveness. Even your repentance, your desire to do a 180 in your life, is a gift from God.

So how do we respond today, in our own encounter with Jesus? Won’t you see your need, and celebrate His forgiveness? Some of you simply need to offer yourselves and claim His forgiveness for your entire life. Though it cost Him everything, He offers it freely. Like this woman with the alabaster jar, experience God’s forgiveness as you encounter Jesus.

Others of you have claimed your salvation in Jesus Christ. You’ve encountered Him; but you find yourself identifying more with the host of the party than the surprise guest. If that is you, For the sake of new life and the future, ARE YOU WILLING...to risk extravagance? Because we know what we know, we can afford to be extravagant. Ask God to free you to love Him extravagantly, and give to others extravagantly, and forgive them extravagantly, and forgive yourself extravagantly. Because we know what we know, we can afford to be extravagant.