Good morning, family. Here we are, just a few weeks from celebrating the day that death was defeated, Resurrection Sunday--our hope based on faith and the evidence of Christ’s resurrection. So soon, we will share the joy of embracing our Living Hope, the newness of life found only in Christ, our sure salvation (1Peter 1:3-7\*). Family, listen. Part of understanding the wonder and beauty of the events of Easter is to understand the love God shows to the world and to us individually. Part of our preparation during Lent is to further embrace the truth that you and I live inside the hope of Easter. As recipients of the Gospel of truth, the applied blood of Jesus, we live inside the hope of the resurrection. But family, how do we respond to Jesus?

In our Gospel reading in Luke, we see the story of two conflicting hearts. Jesus has been invited to the home of Simon, a religious man, a pharisee. We don’t know why. Maybe, the pharisee was curious. Maybe, he wanted to hear Jesus’ teaching firsthand. Maybe, his invitation expresses a desire to gain more respect—an ego-trip, if you will—by hosting the current social/religious “rage.” Maybe, Simon hopes to expose Jesus as a fraud. We don’t know the man’s motivations. Here’s what we do know: Jesus accepts the invitation to minister to everyone at this man’s table and in his home. Luke tells us unequivocally, “He [Jesus] came to seek and to save that which was lost” (19:20). Jesus knows the condition of every soul in the pharisee’s house. The pharisee says to himself that Jesus knows what he, Simon, is thinking (Luke 7:39\*\*). Jesus does know what Simon is thinking, then responds. Each person’s heart is exposed—Simon’s and the woman’s.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*1Peter 1:3-7

Praise to God for a Living Hope

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

\*\*Luke 7:39

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.”

We don’t know much about this woman who enters Simon’s home for the sole purpose of encountering Jesus. Commentaries say that she is uninvited and unwanted. I categorically disagree. She may not be invited the pharisee into his home, but she IS invited by the Holy Spirit, and her presence is wanted by Jesus. She is a sinner, but Jesus wants to minister to her. Probably, most theologians believe, she is a known prostitute. The alabaster jar of perfume would seem to confirm that assessment. But whatever her past, it carries with it a public shame. She comes to the home of a prominent religious leader fully aware of her sin. She comes to find solution for her deepest need, salvation. Her condition confirms this truth: Our awareness of our spiritual condition is tied to our actions. This awareness breeds shame, shame that this woman must overcome to enter the pharisee’s home; she overcomes the shame because of her desire to encounter Jesus of whom she has (obviously) heard. Encountering Jesus requires a response! This woman enters Simon’s home, stands behind the reclining Jesus, and overcome with emotion, weeps. And weeping, she kneels in a pool of her own tears.

Family, listen. We enter into the Christian life not as those who demand, but we are like this woman one of those who graciously and humbly receive. She pours herself out before the Lord. The perfume with which she anoints His feet symbolizes an old life poured out and then a new life, a filling up of the soul with forgiveness and grace. Jesus answers her deepest need. Imaging the aroma of this perfume filling the room, wafting out through the windows into the street. This woman, imprisoned by her own sin and shame and guilt, is now forgiven, debt paid. Allow yourself to be immersed in this story. Be reminded of this testimony of Paul:

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. 13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:12-17

This testimony is my testimony, too. This tale of the woman at Simon’s home and mine are expressions of the extravagant love and mercy of Christ (Luke 7:40-50, see in Passages in support of this sermon at the end of this text). And here’s another joyous truth: Jesus is happy to link His identity to hers (and mine!). Jesus knows her affection, motivated by need and fueled by faith and gratitude. Jesus chooses to love her. And Jesus chooses to love the pharisee. Remember! He accepts the invitation to Simon’s home to minister to *everyone* there: “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25). The woman is moved and expressive in her response to Christ. The Pharisee, it appears, is not moved at all. Jesus tells Simon, “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). In grammar studies, the verb form Christ uses here is the present- perfect tense. This format of a verb expresses something that began in the past, continues in the present, and is expected to continue into perpetuity. This woman who pours out her tears and her perfume upon the feet of Lord Jesus has stopped clinging to her past, acts with a faith begun earlier and now needs expression, and for her expression she receives forgiveness and salvation. Jesus’ forgiveness does more than simply wipe her slate clean. His forgiveness of her removes her burden of guilt and shame. She receives value and worth despite her feelings of unworthiness. Christ tells her, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:50). This blessing from Jesus means to her, “You are no longer at opposition to God.”

So, what does all this mean? It means that forgiveness comes before sanctification (Ephesians 2:3-10\*). Sanctification comes to us because of the Savior’s love, His extravagant love. So, what is our response to Jesus? John writes, “We love because He first loved us” (4:19). Jesus is happy to link his identity to hers. This woman has now a new reputation; she is no longer the “sinner” woman. No, now she is “the woman who \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*Ephesians 2:3-10

3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

kissed and anointed the feet of Jesus. Now she is “the forgiven” woman—the extraordinary effects of true conversion. He comes to us in our rebellion, trouble, pain, mess, and sin, loving us as we are. What is our response? Remember! We are living inside the hope of Easter. The woman of this story treasures Jesus Christ more than she treasures her most valuable possession here on Earth. The person who understands God’s grace is eager to show love to Christ—the Christ who comes to make dead people alive!

Passages in support of this sermon:

Acts 10:38-43

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Luke 7:36-50

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 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 people 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 forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“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—as her great love has shown. But whoever 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.”