

# **Sermon**

**28 September 2014**

**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

**By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald**

**Text: Luke 7:36-50**

**Back to church Sunday**

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Did you know that your foot is the same size as your forearm?

Did you know that a giraffe can go longer without water than a camel?

Did you know that you burn more calories sleeping than watching television?

Did you know that hot water freezes quicker than cold water?

Did you know that crocodiles swallow rocks to help them dive deeper?

Did you know that the average person takes 7 minutes to fall asleep?

I bet you *didn't* know that you were going to learn these things in a church, did you?! Useless information, but true, none the less.

Did you know that 53.8% of people in Scotland are Christians?

Did you know that only about 5% of these people attend church on a Sunday?

Why?

Because they think that they don't need the church? Because they don't feel welcome here?

There once was a woman who hated her life. She became a prostitute because she needed money initially, but then she got so caught up in it, and got used to the money of course, that she just couldn't get herself to break away from it.

Then she heard about this man, Jesus, who forgave people their sins and gave them their lives back. And she was desperate to meet him. She started following him around, but he was always busy and surrounded by huge crowds of people. And because of what she did and who she was, she struggled to get close to him. For starters – everybody knew who she was (and of course pretended that they've never seen her before), which meant that they ignored her and shut her out; and then, of course, he had 12 "bodyguards". But she knew, if she could just get past them and let him see her, that her life would be changed.

So she persevered. Then, one day, Jesus got invited to a well-known politician's house – his name was Simon. Simon heard the same things about Jesus that the prostitute did, but the difference between Simon and the prostitute was that he quite liked his life the way it was. But because of who *he* was, he managed to get Jesus invited over very easily.

But the purpose of this dinner wasn't to change his life or anything; it was mainly to check Jesus out so he could see for himself what all the fuss was about. So he didn't treat Jesus as a special guest, because, in his heart, he didn't really think that Jesus would turn out to be all that great in any case...

But this was the prostitute's lucky day – because the staff at Simon's house were all so curious to see what Jesus looked like, that she grabbed the opportunity to sneak inside while nobody was watching.

She ran straight to Jesus and fell down at his feet, humbling herself because she was in his presence. She knelt down before him and showed him respect in the only way she knew how; crying so much that her tears wet his feet. She felt embarrassed at this, but she just could not stop herself from crying – the moment was just too big.

Very annoyed at his staff for allowing such a spectacle to take place at the dinner table, Simon thought to himself that Jesus wasn't really that special after all, because if he *was*, he would have known who that woman was and that even just being in her company would give you a bad reputation.

But then it was as if Jesus read his mind. Because before he could say anything, Jesus shamed him by saying that this woman – bad reputation and all – treated him with much greater respect than Simon did – even though Simon was in a much better position to do it.

She risked her life to sneak into Simon's house – she knew that she could be thrown into jail for trespassing and that if she was to be put on trial for that, she would be prosecuted for being a prostitute as well, and she would probably be sentenced for life, because nobody would want to defend her. But meeting Jesus was far more important to her than any of that.

Jesus knew that, touched her, and changed her life forever. He gave her a second chance at life, and this time round she was going to do it right.

All this, just because she had faith. Something Simon lacked, although it was freely available to him – Jesus was sitting at his dinner table, after all!

The contrast between these two people are so big, it's scary. Simon was in the position to get anything he wanted, but he didn't even realise that the one thing he really *needed* was right under his nose... Where the prostitute – well, she was so unimportant we don't even know what her name was – she did everything humanly possible to get to meet her Saviour. And that was worth it, through and through.

Something very interesting about this story, is that Jesus wasn't hostile to either of them! He knew Simon's heart, but still he accepted his invitation. He wanted to be a part of Simon's life too. And although nobody wanted to be seen with the prostitute (not in broad daylight, in any case!), Jesus welcomed her in his life too, because he knew that her heart was in the right place.

One can only hope that everything that happened in his house that night also changed Simon's life – my personal opinion is that it did. Because nobody lives through an experience like that, without having a change of heart. Nobody who meets Jesus, are ever the same after.

Jesus opened his arms to both these people. And he still does exactly the same for all of us.

No matter who you are, you are welcome in God's house. God loves all of us. He loves those of us who come to church every Sunday. He loves those of us who only manage every now and again. He loves those of us who stand outside these doors, wondering whether they should come in or not. He even loves those of us who never set a foot in his house. Because he is merciful.

During the French Revolution, a mother approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed the same crime twice and justice demanded death. "But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained, "I plead for mercy." "But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied. "Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all that I ask for." "Well then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

*It would not be mercy if he deserved it...*

Neither Simon, nor the prostitute, *deserved* to be saved by Jesus. The prostitute's lifestyle, and Simon's attitude, really excluded them from the "good list", as my boys would say. But Jesus had mercy on them both.

Nobody can *deserve* mercy. Thank goodness for that! Because I don't think there would be anybody in heaven if we had to prove with our lives that we were worthy! God has mercy for all of us...

No matter whether you are the Simon – the one who does it all right, the one who is regarded highly as a respected citizen, the one with authority, but maybe lacking a little in faith; or whether you are the

prostitute – the one with the dodgy past, the one who's lifestyle is frowned upon by others, the one who has faith, but just needs that nod of approval from Jesus – God loves all of us, and he wants us to come to his house on a regular basis.

Why?

Lots of people say that you don't have to come to church to be saved, to have faith is enough. And they are right – that's all God wants, for us to believe in him. He doesn't expect us to be in church every Sunday.

But / think we need the church, sometimes more than we think. Because it's in the church that we learn more about God, where we get to understand a little more about what faith means. It's here where we see others like us on a weekly basis, people who all struggle with lots of different things, just like we do – people who can support us and who we can support on our shared journey of faith. It's here in the church where we can feel God's presence and where we can experience the fellowship of believers.

The church is like the services on a long journey. It's here where we get to rest for a wee while before we get back on the road again. Where we get our tanks filled with petrol, our windscreens washed and our tyre pressure checked. So we can continue on our journeys – refreshed and ready for what lies ahead of us.

We all know very well that if we are on an actual long journey – it's dangerous not to take a break when you are tired; we know that we won't be able to get anywhere if our tanks are empty and we don't fill

them. So why would we run the risk of going on our spiritual journeys unprepared? That's nothing but a recipe for disaster!

So let's get out on the road and go get that other 95% of our society who pretends not to see the services alongside the road, or who thinks they don't need it. Let's bring them in here and show them how absolutely amazing it is to be showered with mercy, filled with love and given power, especially because these services are for everybody, not only for a select few.

And let's thank God for the opportunity to be here.

So let's all now close our eyes for a few minutes, and just feel the love of God surrounding us...

Amen