

Sermon on Luke 7:36-50 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Worship is pouring ourselves out for Jesus because he was poured out for us.

Some of you may know that I am a bit of an MLS fan. I do like other sports, but I truly enjoy watching soccer. And one team in particular. The Portland Timbers.

In Portland, the footie supporters that are most fervent and active in support of the team are called the Timbers Army. This is the crowd responsible for the life of the stadium during a match and they are often on the road with the team cheering and doing what any passionate fan would do.

What makes the Army noticeable against a sea of sporting spectators however is the way they sing. There are some 20 approved chants or songs on the Timbers Army website and it is encouraged that you know them well enough to hand off your song sheet to someone near you that is not singing.

Titles like: *Take over the World*, *Keep It Up*, *You Cannot Stop Us*, *You Are My Sunshine*, *Party in Portland*, *Mental and Barmy*, *Bury Me in Timbers Green...* among others.

The Army sings to stir their emotions for the game. They sing to invite other people in the stadium or watching to join in. And they sing to inspire the object of their singing, the boys in green, to be victorious.

Honestly, it is amazing. Moving even. RCTID!

I am describing this reality this morning not to use the old pastor trope questioning why we don't worship like sports fans. But instead to point out that it is not weird. What the Timbers Army does week in and week out is, dare I say normal. No one walks away from a game saying "that was strange!"

But when it comes to Christian worship - even those that believe in Jesus can think it awkward.

We want to wrestle with that sense today. An introverts nightmare! But I promise to be gentle and no one will be forced to hold a tambourine.

To an awkward story we go with hopes of seeing what is uncomfortable about worship and why it's good to lean into it anyway.

Luke 7:36-50

Worship is pouring ourselves out for Jesus because he was poured out for us.

Jesus in the thick of his ministry. He is going through the region preaching, talking of the kingdom, he is remarkably gracious to all people. He is welcoming of the outcast. This is all very new for the people so there is significant interest in this carpenter turned Rabbi.

Like many religious leaders - a Pharisee doesn't want to miss the new and trendy draw of a crowd so he invites Jesus to a meal in his home.

In the first century, especially among those of influence and affluence, homes would be a collection of rooms surrounding a courtyard and open space where meals and gatherings would take place. And it would be normal for the public to stop in, to observe the meal of celebrities like this.

So we have Jesus "reclined at table." Likely lying near a low table with his feet behind him because his feet were filthy. Walking around in sandals through dust and animal inhabited areas all day.

Usually, a servant of the host would wash the honored guests feet but in this story, Jesus isn't given deference.

And while the meal is going on, in walks this woman... "of the city." A sinner.

Some believe she was a prostitute, whether she was or not, she is seen as unsavory. How Luke describes her and how the host reacts to her.

And it is her interaction with Jesus that we want to pay keen attention to. Her actions, which are really worship, give us great clues about our own approach toward worship.

At the outset, it is important to know what I mean when I say worship. I really mean all of life, meeting God in the mundane things, and certainly meeting him with the gathered church. It is the reading of his word, preaching, sacraments of communion, baptism, confession, prayer. And especially singing with the church... since that is what you think I mean anyway!

Why worship? "Worship is where the rubber meets the road in one's willingness to endure the discomfort of local church life." It requires us, if we approach it rightly, to set aside preference, and even personality to engage in something we were created for.

Four lessons from this woman that should help form our worship.

1) Jesus is the object of worship

Just as faith is Savior-situated, so worship follows.

It is as if no one else is in the room - for this woman it is just her and the One with the words of life. She has come to set herself below him, that all of her attention and energy would be given to him.

She has no posture of worth or privilege, that he would “desire” her but she needs him.

We don't know where she heard him, what she knew of him. But this is Jesus who just brought a widow's son to life. Recounting the effects of ministry to followers of John the Baptist Jesus says: **Luke 7:22–23** “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. [23] And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (ESV)

Perhaps she heard that as she witnessed his ministry. Whatever it was, she seeks him. She doesn't make a commotion, she doesn't dominate conversation to get noticed. She stays behind him to honor him. To focus on Jesus. It is all about bringing herself to Christ.

“This is the substance of worship: God in His glory, stirring a genuine response of joy and delight that transcends the forms we may employ. He is the object of our worship. Everything else — songs, music, and the like — are simply vehicles we use to help us see him.” John Orton

Jesus is the point of all of our worship. If he is not, it's not Christian.

Stands in contrast to postures of self, my desires, my preference, my pleasure. Christian worship says, “set all of that aside and come and meet Jesus.”

“Worship is not primarily about a particular place, a popular song, or a style of music. Jesus-saturated worship is founded upon truth—for he is the truth—and the tangible presence of his Spirit in us, giving us both access to him and great delight in him.” John Orton

“The entire orientation of worship is God-ward, not me-ward.” McCracken

So in worship, we please God by glorifying him as the object of our worship. The directional north of all we do. **Matthew 4:10** “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” (ESV)

It is Jesus we worship.

Then we see how she worships.

2) Worship is extravagant

I don't know the last time you described something as extravagant but I couldn't think of another word. What else could we call it?!

A woman despised by the room and the culture gives over tears, let down hair and fragrant ointment.

Luke 7:38 “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.” (ESV)

She cries maybe tears of relief, or longing, or joy. She is with Jesus. All of these emotions could be experienced. The people in the room are thinking “compose yourself woman!” And she doesn't give a rip.

She wipes the tear-washed feet with her hair, uncovered, such an intimate display. In the first century if you saw a woman with her hair down or uncovered it probably meant she was your wife or hired for a purpose. She is unashamed and sacrificing her image, what's left of it, by serving Jesus.

Then she douses his feet in perfumed oil. The alabaster jar. Enough ointment to be valued at a year's worth of income. This is like surrendering gold at the feet of Jesus. And she gives it over. All that she is in that moment in worship of Jesus.

Oh my, what it cost her in social capital to worship. Sure she was a sinner, but she was still human, she knew what people would think, she knew how she would be judged. But she did it anyway. Extravagantly giving what she has, who she is. Surrender.

It makes those watching uncomfortable. And by all means that is us.

“Don't wave that flag, you look ridiculous!” “Please don't dance, you have no rhythm.” “My personality prevents me from raising my hands...” “I don't want to sing loud... someone might hear me.”

This is where it gets awkward. The stakes of worship are so high - socially - on both ends of the spectrum (self-conscious, and self-centered spectacle).

“It may be weird, but that is precisely where its power lies.” This is forming how she will relate to Jesus forever.

She isn't performing, and she is not self-conscious at this moment. She doesn't seem to care what others say - she just wants Jesus. And she is going to spend herself to honor him.

And we know why...

3) Worship is responsive

Simon the host can't take it - this dinner was supposed to be about him! He stays quiet about it as to not make a scene. Saying to himself "if Jesus was a prophet he would know who is worshiping him and reject her."

Jesus, being the giver of prophetic insight and voice, responds to Simon giving him an answer by contrasting the religious leader and this woman. Which would be offensive. All of it comes down to forgiveness.

Luke 7:41-42 "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?" (ESV)

'You gave me no water for my feet, but she washed my feet. You gave me no kiss of greeting, she won't stop kissing and welcoming me. You did not anoint my head as an act of honor, she has anointed my feet.'

She has loved much because she has been given much in knowing Jesus. Forgiven much. Fully weighed down by need and she took on his light burden and easy yoke. She hears "your sins are forgiven." And no one can take that back.

This is the motivation of her worship. She is acting in response to who Jesus is and what he does. She had chains, and he broke them by his grace. And nothing is going to stop her from worshipping. Maybe we should paint "your sins are forgiven" over our doors!

And it is not the worship, the sacrifice, the extravagance that saves her. Jesus says "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

You mean, go in praise Jesus!

We can think that worship is about revving up the engine - which it might do - but it is borne out of response to the grace of the focus of our worship. Forgiveness. Jesus' declaration over us of justified.

It is important to have a clear view of our need, the wretchedness of our sin so we can fully understand what salvation means. How Jesus extravagantly poured out his life for us, mocked, beaten before the jeering crowd. Setting aside his rights as the creator of the universe to solve our greatest problem.

How can we not worship in response to this? How can we hold anything back? I think this is one of the reasons we have to preach nothing but the gospel - we are quick to forget, but the good

news of redemption drives us to worship. And since the gospel is meant for every corner of life, so then is worship in response to it.

When we truly get the forgiveness Jesus gives, who knows how extravagant we might get! Like David celebrating the ark of the covenant coming into Jerusalem - he dances - and he says it was not before the people he dances, but before the Lord who had given him grace - and he would be all the more contemptible!

No wonder some people dance. (No wonder some people faintly sway side to side...) They have had a profound experience of the grace of Jesus and they respond to it with who they are before him, for his glory.

Simon the Pharisee missed it. The woman gets it and she goes on living in peace.

What a beautiful picture of worship. But not only is it responsive, personally extravagant and focused on Jesus, it is also for those watching.

4) Worship is for others

The woman is caught up in response to who Jesus is and what he has taught - she is pouring herself out - not with regard for others but we can't help but see how they are affected.

Her worship necessitates a telling of the gospel. For those in the room - they could see and smell, and for generations that would hear of it.

When we worship we are stirring not only our affections for Christ but also those in the church. It is a mark of the church. And we can zoom in here to singing...

Colossians 3:15–16 “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (ESV)

Ephesians 5:18–20 “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, [20] giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (ESV)

People might think we are drunk as we sing to each other but in the melody, we are reminded of the goodness of Jesus - let them think we are crazy!

We gather to sing reminders of the gospel, inviting each other into the worship of Jesus because he is the One worthy.

“Congregational singing is not an occasion for individuals to seek a “just me and Jesus” moment in the midst of a crowd. It is not a private devotional experience... Congregational singing is a teaching ministry of the local church. According to Scripture, it is a vital means through which believers are instructed and transformed by the gospel.” Eric Schumacher

All of us teach and admonish one another, not just the preachers, and we do so by singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Worship is for the church, for others gathered with us. It is discipleship to sing as a church - to declare with our voices the news of Jesus, his glory and grace. (It is good parenting!)

And it might mean sacrifice to live it out. “The vitality of a church’s worship depends on members of the body submitting their autonomous freedom and opinionated preferences to the larger community, and ultimately to the Lord.” Brett McCracken

What a grand purpose in worship - to care for one another.

But it is also evangelism to worship Jesus. It is inviting those outside the church to meet Jesus that they too would join in. “There is an evangelistic power in public worship that declares the praise of God...” Christopher Wright

I wonder who notices our worship today? We think we lose social capital singing in the church with other blood-bought saints... what about worshiping Jesus before a watching world!

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “That is how Christianity conquered the ancient world. It was this amazing joy of these people. Even when you threw them into prison, or even to death, it did not matter, they went on rejoicing; rejoicing in tribulation.”

Singing is training for missions. And training for eternity with all those who like us have and will be redeemed by Christ.

Habakkuk 2:14 “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (ESV)

It will be our experience.

Revelation 7:9–12 “I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, [10] and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” [11] And all

the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, [12] saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (ESV)

For eternity we will, with the masses, be responding in worship to God.

We are singing our way there.

All this from a little lady with some perfume and an experience of forgiveness that forever changed her life.

Worship is Jesus-centered, it is extravagant, responsive, and it is for others. This is our posture - and rather than evaluate our hour together on Sundays - this all stands before us for all of life. May it be said of us that we worship, that we live worshiping like the woman of the city.

Worship is pouring ourselves out for Jesus because he was poured out for us.

John 4:23-24 "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (ESV)

Know Him - As we sing, as we study, as we pray, and in all we do, meet Jesus. Hear how he has poured out his life for you. Hear his declaration over you that your sins are forgiven. That at his work on the cross all that is necessary was finished... Leave behind the old ways of life and live with him.

And Worship - Live in response to that grace. Pour out yourself for his glory - it really is the place of your good. It may mean embracing uncomfortable things, it might mean singing loud, raising hands in thanksgiving. Let it be in response to who Jesus is and what he has done, and let others see, that they too would hear and join the chorus for eternity.

We have many songs, all meant to rally those watching and the team taking the field of life. May we sing of Jesus - of his victory for us - forever.