

Works of Faith and Love

For the next 5 ½ months we will be reading and reflecting upon the Gospel according to St. Luke (each Sunday in this lectionary year C schedule). Luke gives us a very unique perspective on Jesus' ministry. Jesus brings God's healing love to all, especially to the poor, to children, to women, to the sick, to outcasts, to all those beyond the concentration of wealth and power

Jesus uses forgiveness to build faith. Luke's account of the parable of the Prodigal Son is the best known example of forgiveness building faith. In today's Gospel we see a similar contrast – the forgiven sinner is a woman who shows great love, much as the prodigal, younger son receives great love and forgiveness. But the Pharisee who invites Jesus to eat at his home is trapped in his own judgmental attitude and self-righteousness, just as the older brother of the prodigal son. Neither can celebrate forgiveness. Both judge and compare.

We can't be sure exactly who this woman was, although many identify her as Mary Magdalene, especially since Luke mentions Mary a few verses later and tells us that "7 demons" had been cast out of her. Mary Magdalene is one of the women who discovered the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. According to St. John, she alone encountered the Risen Christ first.

Luke's account of this anointing in the Pharisee's house is filled with powerful, physical details. The forgiven, healed woman weeps out of extreme gratitude; her tears fall on Jesus' feet; she dries his feet with her hair; kisses his feet; and anoints his feet.

Faith leads us to acts of love, acts of devotion, acts of care. Faith is knowing God our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Holy Trinity, as we celebrated 3 weeks ago on Trinity Sunday. Faith is knowing forgiveness is always possible. Jesus tells the woman, "your faith has saved you; go in peace." Faith brings healing and peace.

This woman's powerful, intimate, physical devotion to Jesus is an example of faith at work. The Church throughout the ages has used this story to encourage the faithful to their own works of love, their own works of generosity.

First and foremost is our worship; our regular and frequent worship both in community several times a month and individually, in private prayer, at least once each day. How can we say we love God without sharing in the Holy Eucharist several times each month? How can we say we are devoted to Jesus without spending time with Him in prayer and reflection each day?

Worship in public and in private is not an optional activity for a person of faith. It is a necessity. When we take time to worship, to pray, to praise we show our love for God. Worship is simply making time for God.

Another act of generosity, another work of love, are the many volunteer ministries sharing our talents and gifts, as well as our time. Outreach, mission, working at Shrine Mont camps, the food pantry, altar guild, choir, all of these efforts show our love for God and Christ's Body in the world, the Church.

Lastly, we show our love for God with our treasure, our financial support for the Church. In our stewardship we give money, hopefully seriously and sacrificially, not just to support a budget, nor to have a tax deduction. We give because it is a way to show our love for God and our thanksgiving for all God has given to us.

I'm so pleased that we now have an active group of Trustees working on our Grace Trust. Several months ago we had the largest single gift to the Trust since it was established 15 years ago. This gift of over \$170,000 from the estate of a parishioner who for decades gave her time and talents to Grace Church should inspire us all. Our trust totals more than \$700,000. This is wonderful. But I hope that before I die this will increase 10-fold. Why not \$7 million for the Trust of Grace Church in the next 15, 20, 25 years? We can make this happen.

Acts of love, works of generosity. Where do you see them in your life? In the life of the Church? In our parish life at Grace? May the woman in today's Gospel inspire us to grow as close to Jesus as we can; to show Jesus how much we love him; to know our faith has saved us and we, too, can go in peace.

Galatians 2:15-21

Luke 7:36-8:3