

Did you know that of our five senses, our sense of smell is the most powerful? The Bible tells us God has a sense of smell. After the Flood, Noah offered a sacrifice to God. The smoke of Noah's sacrifice is called sweet. *"And the LORD smelled a sweet savor; and the LORD said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake"* (Genesis 8:21). It continues on into the New Testament, Ephesians 5:2 says, *"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."* We're made in the image of God. Our Creator designed our olfactory system as a proof that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

This morning I want you to smell the sermon. We're going to work through some exercises to help us focus on this particular sense. I'll put pictures on the screen of things which emit different aromas. Then, I want you to vote by saying either: *"Eeeww,"* — if, in your opinion, it's a bad aroma or *"Aaaahhh"* — if, in your opinion, it's a good one. Got it? Ready?

- Freshly Brewed Coffee
- Diesel Fuel
- Peanut Butter
- Vick's VapoRub
- Cheese
- Mothballs
- Bacon
- Perfume, specifically Chanel #5

Did you know Chanel No. 5 is still the most popular perfume, some 100 years after it was first created by Coco Chanel (**picture**)? She wanted a "woman's perfume with a woman's scent?" It wasn't Chanel No. 5 that day but it was a perfume, a sweet aroma. It was better, it was **The Sweet Smell of Forgiveness**. I want you to leave here smelling this message today so it fills your life every moment of every day, Luke 7:36-50 (p. 864).

Jesus is invited to a banquet. Like all banquets there are scores of tantalizing aromas. Smells like freshly picked fruit—figs, pomegranates, grapes, meat roasting over an open fire, fresh bread baking in an oven. Peppers, onions, garlic and other spices sizzling together in a pan.

The host of this banquet was a Pharisee named Simon. Don't confuse him with Simon Peter, Simon the Zealot, Simon the leper, or even Simon Cowell. Simon was a common name in Jesus' day. This Simon is a member of that infamous group of guardians of Jewish tradition and religious law who repeatedly align themselves against Jesus, attacking Him for His teaching.

But an uninvited and unwanted guest appears and changes everything, particularly how this banquet smelled. This is a powerful and moving scene. William Barclay insightfully writes, *"This is one of the stories which is so vivid that it makes one believe that Luke may well have been an artist."*

Last Sunday we talked about how Jesus was accused of being a *Party Animal*. Here we find Him at a party, reaching out to both pious Pharisees and befriending a soiled dove. It's **The Sweet Smell of Forgiveness**.

Two essential truths emerge from this wonderful account. First, Jesus' openness to welcome anyone, from the upper crust to the outcasts of society. Second, His power, as the God-man to forgive sins. It continues to develop Luke's theme of Jesus' compassion for the disenfranchised.

Today we want to do something totally different. Please don't just hear or see the sermon, smell it. What's our first smell?

**1. Sanitized, High Society. Having Jesus in your house isn't the same as having Him in your home.** Have you ever been in a mansion...a really rich person's house? It doesn't really smell much like anything, kind of sterile. There's no real smell of life or people living there. It's smells a bit like Pine Sol. That's the smell I think of when I imagine Simon. *"One of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him, and He went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table."*

Simon is not a friend of Jesus. While he's not an enemy as far as we know, at the very least, he's a skeptic, a cynic, maybe even a spy. Perhaps he's someone who liked to brag about celebrities he knew and Jesus was certainly a celebrity. We do know Simon is very judgmental and self-righteous, and not a person of

grace. He's also a Pharisee. The Pharisees hounded Jesus most of His ministry. This was not some friendly social event. At best, it was a bit of a dissection or interrogation.

But Simon, though he doesn't realize it, is a sinner too and Jesus is *"the friend of sinners"* (Matthew 11:19). Jesus didn't have any "my people" or "His crowd." As His ambassadors, as people of the Gospel, we can't either. Most of us have people or groups we'd rather avoid. As Jesus' disciples, declining is not an option. Jesus accepts the invitation because though Simon was unlovable, Jesus loved still him and longed to call him to salvation and repentance. This is important! The Cross is for Pharisees, too.

We must remember – Jesus died for everyone, even those we struggle to like. He didn't neglect anyone and we can't either. The two men who later would bury Jesus, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, were Pharisees who'd become Christ-followers.

Do you believe in accidents? I don't. I believe in divine appointments. Like Simon, God brings people into our lives we wouldn't choose to interact with. They need the Gospel just like us. How will we ever win a lost world if we only hang out with "our people?" Yet, while Jesus accepted the invitation, truth is still on the menu. He doesn't brutalize Simon with it. Like a skilled surgeon, Jesus cuts back the layers exposing Simon's darkened soul.

Amazingly, though Jesus is a guest, He's snubbed and mistreated. Simon apparently purposefully omits common courtesies which were to be given an honored dinner guest. Sometimes we're not going to be treated well. We'll be snubbed, even abused. But we're still to go.

Who's your Simon? Who has Jesus sent you to reach but you'd rather decline the invitation? You may have difficulty loving them, so let Jesus love them through you.

**2. Baby Powder. Regeneration always results in response.** Within 24 hours, I was recently blessed with not one but two new great-nephews. Joseph Dennis Pegram (**picture**) at 8 lbs. 8 oz. and 20.75" made his grand entry to be welcomed by his parents, Josh & Liz and two older sisters, Gracen and Clara Jane in Rockford. His cousin and my newest great-nephew, Rex Elliot Pegram (**picture**) soon followed at 9 lbs, 3 oz and 21". He was welcomed by Bryce & Chelsea in Detroit. Baby powder...lots of it.

Verse 37 fills the air with baby powder. It's a new baby, sobbing in gratitude to her Savior. *"And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that He was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 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."*

It helps to know something about dinner parties in biblical times. They didn't sit at a table, but would lie on a couch to eat. They took their sandals off with their feet sticking out behind them (**picture**).

Homes had an open floor plan. A wealthy man like Simon would host his guests in a courtyard. The meal would have been a semipublic occasion, more like a block party than a private dinner. It was common for people who weren't invited to come in and out, or sit at the edge of the courtyard.

What was uncommon though was for a woman like her to show up at a house like this, and do what she did for Jesus. We don't even know her name. The only thing we know is she was a notorious sinner. It's mentioned three times: once by Luke, once by Simon and once by Jesus. The wording indicates she'd probably been a prostitute. She washes Jesus' feet with the long hair once used to entice customers. The expensive perfume may have been purchased to seduce them and was probably purchased with sin money.

Maybe she'd listened when Jesus taught from the edge of the crowd. We're not sure. The wording clearly indicates she'd been redeemed and now is a Christ-follower. This was not an act of salvation, but of service and gratitude.

Somehow she learns the One who revolutionized her life was going to be at dinner in her town. Maybe at first, she simply stood there, looking at Jesus with grateful, adoring eyes. Perhaps she noticed Simon neglected the common cultural courtesy of having a slave wash Jesus' dirty feet. Remember, they didn't have paved roads but shared roads with livestock. You walked through, dirt, mud and feces. They'd stick their dirty feet out as they ate while reclining, their feet behind them at a U-shaped table.

As she looks at Jesus, she's overwhelmed with emotion. Maybe she'd told herself not to cry. Somehow she couldn't help it as she starts to wash His feet (**picture**). She remembers all the horrible things she's done, using her body and soul for the service of Satan, but she knew Jesus had mercy on her. This soiled dove had been forgiven and is overwhelmed with thankfulness. The word for *crying* means "raining." She's literally raining tears on Jesus feet. She has no towel, so she lets down her long hair to wipe them dry.

When a Jewish woman was married, she put her hair up the morning after her wedding night and never let it down again in public. If she did, it was grounds for divorce. She, though, is so overcome with emotion, all propriety is set aside. This offense was so serious the rabbis put a woman's loosening her hair in the same category as uncovering her breasts in public. When her hair came down, the shock level of the guests and onlookers shot up. It was a big deal! But she doesn't care what anyone thinks. She's overcome with gratitude, love and emotion.

Sobbing women aren't pretty but here she is a sobbing, snotty, hair askew mess, pouring out her prized possession of perfume to anoint Jesus' feet. It was the most precious thing she owned, but now she's pouring it all out for Jesus...because she's not going to need it anymore.

She smothers His feet with kisses. She is so overwhelmed with love and gratitude, she forgets herself entirely. Jesus has washed her guilt and shame away, and so she is honored to wash His feet. She never says a word. Her actions say it all. It's a supreme gesture of deep love and gratitude.

And it's normal when you know what Jesus saved you from. Have you ever lost it like this? Have you ever been so moved by the Gospel, moved by Jesus' grace and love for YOU, you're overcome with emotion? I have. I can relate to her. In fact, when I finally see Jesus face to face, I think I'll probably lose it. I know what a horrible sinner I am. Maybe we all will. Maybe it's what Scripture means when it says when we get to Heaven, "*He will wipe every tear from our eyes*" (Revelation 21:4).

Do you know why we're so sophisticated with our Christianity? Most of us forget how repulsive our sin is. Or, we're unaware how repulsive our sin is to a holy God. We don't comprehend it was our sin which crucified Jesus. It was our sin the Father couldn't look at, as He saw His Son crucified. The closer you get to Jesus, the more you're cognizant of how revolting your sin is, how unworthy you are and how much you're like this woman...or worse. And you can't help but be overwhelmed with love and gratitude! What you deserve, what I deserve is Hell, not love or mercy and grace!

No wonder Dr. Karl Barth (**picture**) one of the most brilliant theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when asked for an insightful theological statement, stated simply, "*Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.*"

If we really saw how vile our sin is and how much Jesus has forgiven us, it'd revolutionize our lives...and we'd revolutionize our world. Like this woman, we wouldn't care what anyone thinks. We'd nearly shout from the housetops what Jesus did for us. **Regeneration always results in response.**

**3. The sterile smell of surgery. Our heart's condition reveals what we see.** This woman hasn't said a word, but neither has Simon. "*Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, He would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'* And Jesus answering said to him, '*Simon, I have something to say to you.*' And he answered, '*Say it, Teacher.*'" Did you catch that? And Jesus answering... Answering what?

Jesus saw Simon's heart. The Great Physician took the scalpel of His omniscience. He saw the pride and gracelessness in Simon's soul. Jesus knew exactly who she is and He knows exactly who Simon is. And Jesus knows who we are, "*For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Simon thinks he's righteous. He'd never touch a sinner and would never let one touch him. If he'd been Jesus, he'd have kicked her away and then kicked her out. Simon doesn't really see this woman. He's blind. The biggest thing he's blind to is himself. He's a prideful unforgiven sinner, while she's a forgiven one. This woman is in a better relationship with God than he is.

The Gospel is messy. It's why we know Simon knew nothing of the Gospel. He wanted nothing to do with messy. If we're going to be a Gospel church, we must welcome messy. Be honest. Many of you know churches. Does the average church in America want messy? I have to say, "No." The church is Simon, the church has become sterile and pharisaical.

I want to say this graciously. If you don't want anything to do with messy, you either need to repent or you need to find another church...because the Gospel is messy and this church is committed to sharing the Gospel!

The love of Jesus must motivate us to build relationships with the obvious sinners we know. Atheists, addicts, abortionists, adulterers, gays, thieves, liars, even the self-righteous. Too often we don't know them or don't have a relationship with them because our hearts are frozen like Simon's. We're repulsed by external sin, yet miss the vileness apart from Christ in our own hearts. Like this woman, they know we're repulsed by them and it hinders us from sharing the Gospel with them.

What would happen if we believed God had grace for sinners? If we loved them the way Jesus loves this woman? That kind of love has the power to revolutionize lost souls. This kind of love will revolutionize our lives!

**4. The pungent scent of cash being exchanged. Gratitude is always the response to debt forgiveness.** Most of us love stories. When I was growing up, we had a preacher who'd visit our church, Michael Guido. He was a phenomenal story teller. Decades later I can still remember his stories.

Jesus is a master story teller. A story is a great way to communicate truth, so Jesus shares what is one of His shortest parables with Simon, vss. 41-48. *“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, ‘The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.’ And He said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’ Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she has anointed My feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ And He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven’.”*

A denarius was roughly the amount of money a laborer or soldier made working an entire day. These are middle class wages. One man owed 500 denarii and another 50. What's the total amount you make in almost two years? That's how much the first man owed. The second man owed about two months wages. But the banker forgave both debts. Who's going to be more appreciative? It's a no-brainer. Even Simon gets the right answer. It's a financial illustration of how great God's forgiveness is. Do you know how great God's forgiveness is?

**a. To comprehend God's forgiveness, you must realize your great debt.** Romans 3:23 says, *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* The key word is *“all.”* Some of us may have greater debt than another. But we're all in debt. None of us have the ability to pay. Adam and Eve had a small debt of eating only one piece of fruit forbidden by God. But they couldn't graft the fruit back on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We are all sinners. We all owe God.

Don't you hate bills? What if every month God sent you a bill for all the sins you committed? The problem is, it never decreases. It only grows. Our good works must be perfect to cut back on our sin bill but they're not.

Maybe you're thinking, I haven't sinned much. I don't owe God much. Have you ever lied? Have you ever stolen something? Maybe just a few office supplies from work? Have you coveted, wishing maybe you owned a car like some movie star? Or, had the money someone else has? Have you ever smarted off to your Dad or Mom? Have you ever been so mad at someone you could kill them? Have you ever thought sexual thoughts about anyone who's not your spouse? If you've done all these things – and you probably have – you've already broken 6 of the 10 commandments. You're a lying, thieving, coveting, disrespectful, murdering sexual pervert and we haven't covered the other four. You're in debt to God!

**b. To comprehend God's forgiveness, you must realize your total inability to pay your great debt.** Isaiah 64:6 says, *“All our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment...”* Notice it's our righteous deeds. That means our best deeds, Boy Scout stuff, is like a putrid cloth in God's sight. If we work hard but goof off just a wee bit, tell the truth 99.99% of the time, are faithful to our spouse and rarely window shop, only get angry when we're really provoked – we're still in debt. Because God's standard is perfection. In other words, if you owe \$50 or \$5000, you're still in debt. If you don't have it, which when it comes to righteousness, none of us do then we're unable to pay.

WE Energies doesn't care if you owe \$50 or \$5000, if you don't pay, they're cutting your power. The amount is insignificant. If you can't pay, you can't pay. We're all debtors. In the bank of Heaven, we're all broke.

So who's in bigger trouble, the person who drowns in 50 feet of water or 500? It'd be stupid for the man who drowned in 50 feet of water to brag he's better off because it wasn't 500 feet. Either way you're still dead.

**c. To comprehend God's forgiveness, you must trust completely in His grace to forgive your debt.** Ephesians 2:8 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”* What made the moneylender's act so generous is by forgiving the debts of these two individuals, he took those debts upon himself. That's what God did. We're flat broke, but on the Cross, Jesus paid our debt.

I've got a question. Do you know of any bank that will pay your debt for you when you have no way of ever repaying the debt? No, yet that's exactly what God did with the death of His own Son.

This is the great difference between Christianity and all other religions. Every other religion tells you what you must do to pay your debt to God: go to Purgatory and suffer, reincarnate through multiple lifetimes, crawl to Mecca, give big bucks. Only Christianity says, “You don't have to do anything. Not only

that, you can't." God gave His Son. How insulting for anyone to suggest, "God, I'm going to pay you back for Jesus." You can never pay back God's gift of grace. You must just accept it.

**d. When you accept God's forgiveness, you're overwhelmed with gratitude.** 2 Corinthians 9:15 says, "*Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*" (NASV) I worry about people who are stingy with God. Something is wrong when you have to beg a professing believer to give time, or money or their abilities to God. It's like getting blood out of a rock. You have to wonder, "Do they really know Jesus?" And that's Jesus' point. When you know you've been forgiven by God, it's not "How much do I have to give?" It's "How much can I give?" It's praying, "God please bless me, help me to grow so I can give more and more."

Simon is stingy with Jesus. He didn't think he owed anything. This forgiven prostitute did everything Simon should have done, plus more. *Why?* She was overwhelmed with gratitude for God's great grace!

My prayer life has changed because of this passage. I'm not praying so much for people to give or serve. I've started praying that our church will grow in love and gratitude, that we'll realize the debt we owe and that God forgave. Grateful Christians are generous givers of all they have.

When Mom Cummins was alive, I had folk who thought it was cool and were surprised while her mind was no longer all there, I was committed to seeing her and taking her out to eat every month. I loved her dearly but what they didn't realize was that I wasn't giving Mom a gift. I was paying a debt. If Dave and Mary Cummins (Dad & Mom) hadn't invested in my life when I was a teen and rescued me, I don't know where I'd be today. It was a privilege to spend time with Mom because of my great debt!

Even frigid hearted Simon gets it, "*Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.'*" It's why John Newton (**picture**) the perverse, cruel slave trader wrote *Amazing Grace*. Newton knew how much he'd been forgiven by God.

This doesn't mean we must fall into the depths of sin to love deeply. No, what we need is a greater consciousness of sin. The depth and passion of our Christianity corresponds to how deeply we see our personal guilt and then our forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:** The bottom line is you're one of two people in this story. You either stink like Simon or you're a fragrance of forgiveness like this former prostitute. Which one are you?

If you think you're a pretty good person, fairly moral, you stink! John Owen (**picture**) observed, "*He who has slight thoughts of sin never has great thoughts of God.*" Simon minimized his sin and missed how much he, too, desperately needed God's forgiveness.

Yet, you're a sweet fragrance of forgiveness if you know you're a sinner, undeserving of God's grace. If you know that if Jesus hadn't died for you and paid your debt, you'd be under God's judgement. And like this woman, you've thrown yourself upon God's mercy. If that's you, then you're a fragrance of forgiveness.

So which one are you? Which of these two characters is more like your relationship with Jesus? Are you more like the holier than thou Pharisee? You think you've got it together spiritually. You don't really need what Jesus offers, namely, forgiveness of sins. Are you like Simon?

Or, are you like this woman? Do you see without Jesus, you'd be hopelessly lost in your sins? Like her, are you at liberty to express your deep feelings of love and gratitude for the Savior, in spite of what others might think?

God wants each of us to take an honest look at ourselves and identify with either the Pharisee or the prostitute. Please understand, the prostitute is the preferable character here!

Paul said, "*Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I'm proof—Public Sinner Number One—of someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy*" (1 Timothy 1:15, *The Message*). Francis of Assisi (**picture**) said, "*There is nowhere a more wretched and more miserable sinner than I.*" The greatest sin is to think you're good enough and have no need of a Savior. God's people, like this woman, are those who realize their greatest need is forgiveness for their sin.

**Three Final Steps** and we're done.

- 1. If like this woman, you've never thrown yourself at the feet of Jesus, admitting you're a sinner, crying out for a Savior, come to Jesus today.**
- 2. If like Simon you think you're a good person, please look in the mirror of God's Word. Read Romans 3 and repent of your self-righteousness. Come to Jesus because He came to rescue all sinners, even the self-righteous.**

***3. If you've forgotten the debt you owe, what a wretch you were apart from God's grace, repent and ask God to re-light the embers of your soul with blazing gratitude for His forgiveness.***

May God in His grace break through all of our hearts and cause us to lovingly burn with love and gratitude for Him because of His undeserved mercy, grace and forgiveness to us!