Irvington Presbyterian Church

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**“A Creed of Sacred Love”**

Larry Thorson

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*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.”*

*New International Version*

During this season of Lent, the six weeks leading up to Easter, we’re learning, memorizing and trying to apply the very creed that Jesus lived by: the Jesus Creed. Let’s recite it together: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus said there is no greater commandment than this.

Today for a few minutes let’s think about that little word “all” in the creed. I’ve probably officiated at fifty weddings in my 33 year career. I’ve seen all kinds of crazy situations including drunk couples, mad couples, pregnant brides, deathbed weddings and a whole lot more.

There is a part of the ceremony called the vows that every couple I’ve worked with puts in their ceremony. Long before the ceremony I always give the couple sample vows which they can use and usually do. One of the lines in the vow asks “And forsaking all others will you keep only unto him (or her) till death do you part? Will you? I always emphasize the word ***all*** slowing down as I say it looking the bride or the groom straight in the eye.

You see in a marriage it doesn’t work if one partner forsakes sexual relationships with everyone else but the other partner doesn’t. For a relationship to truly work there has to be **absolute commitment** on the part of both parties. We’ve probably all known people who couldn’t do that and because of that, they had multiple partners throughout their life. A certain presidential candidate comes to mind right now.

If you are in love with someone you love them with all that you have, you don’t compartmentalize and love them just over dinner. Or just over sex. Or just over housing arrangements. The totality of loving with our whole being is what makes love sacred. It’s something held in honor.

Scott McKnight in his book The Jesus Creed quotes Laurie Hall’s **An Affair of the Mind** which tells the painful story of a husband who spiraled into sexual addictions. Soon after their initial separation she began writing her husband letters. In one letter she *writes “Here I am, three weeks into our separation. I didn’t sleep much last night. The bed seemed so cold without you n it. Finally, somewhere in the wee hours, I dozed off fitfully. When I woke up this morning, I thought back to that first morning when I awakened in your arms, so happy, so hopeful of all the bright tomorrows we were going to have. Yet, here I am 20 years later, thinking about how I might never again lie in your arms.*

*“Besides loneliness, I feel sick-like I’m going to throw up-and I tell myself I have to be strong for the children. But that’s not all I feel. What I feel mostly is anger. I’m mad. I don’t understand why you won’t let go of the pornography and the hookers. How could you choose them over the children? How could you choose them over me? You were all I ever wanted. How come I wasn’t enough for you?”* How sad that love in his marriage wasn’t held sacred by the husband. He chose to take away its sacredness by putting something in front of it. The word “all” is an important word in marriage. “Forsaking all and keeping only unto him or her.”

So how is our relationship different with God? Before the prophet Hosea came along no one in Israel seemed to see God as a lover. He was God and Israel was his people. But Israel didn’t see it as a love affair until Hosea comes along and says YHWH (God) loves Israel the way a husband is to love his wife. In the same way Israel was to love YHWH by giving their all allegiance. That’s what makes love sacred, there’s nothing placed in front of it.

But Hosea compared Israel’s love to the “love” of a wife who walks out the door one day and turns herself into a prostitute. I know the language is a little blunt but that’s the Bible. Hosea next suggests that God is so heartsick over his people’s unfaithfulness to him that he pleads with Israel to come back to him. I like how Scot McKnight says “YHWH, the spurned Lover of Israel, sounds like someone singing on an FM station.”

*“I am now going to allure (or romance) her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”* (Hosea 2:14-15)

Is that your picture of God? Is he someone who romances you back to him. Someone who makes you a top priority in his life? Someone who makes loving you sacred?

Our Scripture reading today contrasts two people. In verse 37 we read

***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.*

Why did she do that? Obviously she was in love with Jesus. But why was she in love with Jesus? Possibly because she knew how bad she was and that nobody really loved. People she had contact with only used her except for Jesus who lived out his creed to love others as he would like to be loved.

Now contrast that to the Pharisee who was hosting a dinner for Jesus at his house. He apparently was not in love with Jesus even though Jesus was in love with him. The Pharisee probably had an intellectual curiosity about Jesus. That’s why he most likely would have invited him over for dinner. But he didn’t see any need Jesus could fulfill in his life. He didn’t see anything that needed changing.

In verse 44 we read what Jesus said to his host: *“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.”*

Now remember this woman was a prostitute. At one point she sold her soul to the devil but was now very sorry for what she had done. The man on the other hand was a religious leader who thought his religious activities gave him some kind of diplomatic immunity from needing a savior. But of course it didn’t. The Pharisee had all kinds of attitude issues not the least of which was entitlement. What Jesus seems to be indicating here is that the more we love, the more we know we’ve been forgiven.

Genuine Christian worship happens not when the right songs are sung in the right key with the right instruments with the right lighting in the right kind of sanctuary. I like how Scot McKnight says “Genuine Christian worship happens when I comprehend 1) who I really am before God – a love-violating sinner, 2) how faithful and gracious God is to his sacred commitment of love for me, and 3) how incredibly good God is to open the floodgates of that love to me.

Do you really comprehend who you are before God? Do your words and your actions agree with your comprehension?

**Small Group Ice Breaker Questions**

**1.** What is one special gift you’ve received from your spouse, child, parent or friend? What made it special?

**2.**  What parties do you enjoy? Dislike?

**Recite the Jesus Creed as a Group**

**Discussion Questions**

1. What do you think are the differences between a relationship and a love affair?
2. In Laurie Hall’s book An Affair of the Mind she describes the decline of her relationship with her husband due to his pursuit of pornography. What are some other factors and pursuits that break down a relationship?

1. Loving God with our mind was not part of the original Hebrew Shema prayer that Jesus adapted. Why did he add it?
2. Why do you think the prophet Hosea used the prostitution illustration in describing Israel? Do you think it was appropriate language for a family book like the Bible?
3. What kind of a connection do you think Israel had with God during the time of Hosea?
4. The woman in Jesus’ story was a prostitute. What risk was this woman taking in coming to the house of Simon, the Pharisee? What does this tell you about her state of mind?
5. Who does Simon remind you of?
6. Who do you relate to more, the woman in the story or Simon?
7. How difficult is it for you to express your love in a relationship with Jesus?
8. What have you learned from this story that you could use this week to love God with all of your being?

**TO LEARN MORE**

**Join a Small Group – call the church office for times and location 510/657-3133**

**To learn and encourage one another**

**IF YOU’D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO**

**GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s ideal**

**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**

**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**

**Romans 8:5**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow Him to become the master of our life**

**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below…**

*“Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me.”*