

Title: “The Knife and the Cord”

Chris Ryan

Luke 7:36-50

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Service Readings: Isaiah 52:11-15, Luke 7:36-50

Exegetical: In this narrative, Luke records the forgiveness of a woman and the judgement of a Pharisee. Jesus was invited to the Pharisee’s home for dinner and was not welcomed in a custom fitting of a revered guest. While dining, a lady approached Jesus and wept at his feet. She dried them with her hair and anointed them with oil. Jesus replies to the Pharisee’s silent judgment with a parable and declaration of the forgiveness of this woman’s sins.

Focus: Jesus walks our sins to the cross where they are forgiven.

Function: That my hearers may understand that our sins, once forgiven, are forever forgotten.

Malady: We recognize our sins have been forgiven by God, but we don’t forgive ourselves. We live a life of guilt, not believing that our sins have been forgotten.

Means: (Christus Vicar) Jesus collects our sins as tears upon his feet and he carries them to the cross where he gives up his life. And his blood washes those tears, washes them away with our sins, forever forgets them, and restores us to new life.

Few things are more nerve wracking, or more rewarding than jumping out of a perfectly good airplane. Picture positioning yourself in hull of an aircraft. You have just stepped into it and find that there are no seats but for the pilot. You look for a spot to sit and get comfortable, as comfortable as you can with the foreknowledge of what is about to happen. All is quiet and still, and your mind begins to imagine what the next few moments will be like. You’re not nervous, just anxious to get through it. And then the engines start and the propellers begin to turn. The plane begins to speed down the runway and only seconds later you feel the earth release its grip on the wheels - you are airborne. The plane begins its steep ascent and as the altitude increases, so does your anxiety. The realization of your choice begins to weigh down on you. “Do I *really* want to go through with this,” you ask yourself? “Is this *really* something that will bring me joy?” A little voice deep within your mind reminds you that you can back out. It tells you that you still have the ability to change your mind and return no different than you left. And as the plane climbs that little voice gets louder, more direct. It begins to tempt you with fear and uncertainty. “Will you *really* survive the jump,” it demands to know? “Is the reward *really* worth the cost?”

The aircraft has now leveled off and the door has opened. Your name is called, and you make your way to the edge of the opening. The very tips of your toes hang off the ledge but not enough to force your commitment. You look down, past your shoes to see the ground thousands of feet below you. That is your target, that is your reward. The ground that you voluntarily left is the same ground you now see as your goal. If you can make it there alive you will walk upon it as a new person - a person who has fallen but is alive. Your mind is screaming at you, now. It is hurling every reason it can to persuade you to stay in the plane. It promises you the same confidence, the same sense of

freedom as if you had jumped. You know that not to be true, but the thought is so tempting. Is it really possible to experience freedom without taking this step? With this step, control will be out of your hands. You will be at the mercy of the parachute pull cord that is attached to the plane. As you fall, that cord will release your parachute. You won't have a say in that decision. Your "say" will have ended immediately after you left the plane. You are confident that the cord will work, confident that the chute will open, confident that you will live. But then, why are you still so afraid? Why are you still second guessing if you should go through with it?

And so, you jump. And seconds later it is all over. Your parachute is open, your life secured, and the feeling is amazing. You take a moment to smile and live in the moment.

<short pause>

And then you pull out a knife and cut away the parachute.

<PAUSE>

That's absurd. Unimaginable, really. Who, in their right mind would discard their parachute after it saved their life? *Why* would they even consider it? And yet, isn't that what we sometimes do with the forgiveness that is granted to us by others? Do you remember that one argument you had with your spouse? That one where you uttered comments that were hurtful and the next morning you felt awful? You built up your courage, just like at the edge of the plane, you held your breath, and jumped. In jumping, you asked for forgiveness. And, just like the cord, you were given it. You were forgiven. But instead of living in that moment, instead of rejoicing in the parachute, you instead cut it from your body so that you could continue to live in guilt and shame. You traded freely given forgiveness the free fall of self-inflicted remorse and regret. *Why?*

And we do this with God, too! We approach the cross with our sins; we ask for forgiveness, with full confidence that he will forgive us. But after we receive it, after we *know* that we are free, we carry around our guilt. *Why?* Do we not believe we deserve his forgiveness? Do we not *trust* in his forgiveness?

In our gospel passage we follow the skydive experience of the woman.

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ 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, 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.

She stands at the edge of the plane. She knows what she has done; she knows the sins of her life. She can stay in the plane, stay comfortable in her sins, or she can jump. Do you think she had the same confidence of Jesus' forgiveness as we have with our parachute? I don't know, but I do know that she jumped. Her actions say to me that she saw this as her *only* option. Staying in the plane was more frightening to her than placing her life in the hands of Jesus.

She jumped, and Jesus saved her.

⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” ⁴⁸ And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus collected her sins as tears upon his feet and he carried them to the cross where he gave up his life for her. And he did the same for us. His blood washed over her tears and the washed over ours. His blood washed those tears away, washed those sins away. Completely. He forgave her and I am guessing that she believed him and lived a new life in that forgiveness. What about you? Will you too live in the new life that he offers you through his blood? Will you too stay connected to the parachute of Christ's forgiveness?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

Please help me to forgive myself for the mistakes that you have forgiven me for. Please help me to release and heal guilt, shame, regret, and fear. Please help me to see myself as you see me - a forgiven child of God.

In your name we pray. Amen.