

Grace and Truth

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14 NIV

In Luke 7:36-50, the physician who was a disciple of the Apostle Paul records that a certain Pharisee invited Jesus and his disciples to his house. While there a “sinful woman” found Jesus there and brought very expensive perfume with her to anoint Jesus with. While Jesus was at the table the woman covered the feet of Jesus with her tears and perfume and dried his feet with her hair. Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisee who determined that Jesus wasn’t a prophet or he would not let such a woman touch him.

Jesus took this opportunity to teach grace and truth. Jesus chose Simon to teach so that all could hear the teaching, the question and the answer. The parable Jesus taught was about a lender who forgave a small debt and a large debt. Jesus asked Simon which man would love the lender more? Simon replied that the man who had been forgiven more would love the one who forgave him more than the man would have been forgiven less.

Then Jesus told Simon that he had judged correctly, and he pointed out that no one had wash his feet when he entered the house but the woman washed his feet with her tears. No one had given Jesus a greeting kiss that night, but the woman had not stopped kissing his feet. No one anointed Jesus with oil, but the woman anointed his feet with perfume. Jesus explained because the woman’s sins were great, she loved the one who forgave her great. Those who have not had as much forgiven love the forgiver less. Then Christ told the woman her sins were forgiven. Then those at the table questioned the authority to forgive sins. To that Jesus told the woman that her faith had saved her.

In ministry I live in two realms. The realm of the church folks who dress “correctly”, speak correctly, worship correctly and to sum it up; are correct. Meanwhile, the lost sheep seek me out, confess all of their “inappropriate” sin, still have “rough” associates and colleagues, and don’t fit in well with the church folks. I remember years ago ministering to two very different folks that I have both since laid to rest. One was the oldest living member of our church for much of her twilight years on earth. The other man was a member of a motorcycle gang. The lady always wore a new designer outfit every day of the week. The man stood most days on street corners holding cardboard signs with gospel messages. The lady never had a hair out of place and was elegant. The man could be smelled many feet away. The man would sit near the older lady described during morning worship. She would never say a word during the service. The man would loudly say, Amen! during my message repeatedly. The woman would not speak to the man in church or any other time. The man would always greet the lady and offer her a farewell blessing. One Sunday morning the lady came to church early so that she could ask me a question. She asked me I would tell the man who sat near her to set somewhere else. I declined her request. This infuriated her. She told her family to find another minister to officiate her funeral. There were special Sundays when we had a full church and the man would give up his seat so others could sit. When the man passed away, he had no money for a funeral. He had given everything he had to ministry. For years, those “rough” friends of his have kept paying the bill on the billboard the man bought along the interstate highway with one of those gospel messages. In no way am I passing judgement on the lady who wouldn’t sit next to the sinner. I pray I see her in the kingdom of Heaven. But I am confident to tell you who loved their Redeemer more. The man was 100% counting on the blood of Christ to wash away all of his sin. Grace was the man’s truth. Amen!

Christ has shown us all grace and truth not only by his teaching, but also by his example. The grace, compassion and mercy that Christ has extended to me is now to be extended to my fellowman. Sometimes this means to extend grace, compassion and mercy to the undesirables of the community. When folks come to worship fresh out of rehab or jail we are given the privilege to hold out the word of truth just as Jesus did. Not just so the “sinners” can be saved. But the Holy Spirit may also prick the hearts of the oldest members of the church resulting in grace, compassion and mercy on their fellowman.