

"When Pitiful Is Beautiful"

Text: Proverbs 9:1-10

May God the Holy Spirit fill you with the sort of humility that causes you simply to fall at the Savior's feet and cry out, "God be merciful to me, the sinner." Amen.

Fellow Servants of the Triune God:

Some time ago I happened to see a, well, *creature*. It was purported to be a dog of some sort. Didn't look like a dog to me. It looked, in a word, pathetic – hideously so. What caught my interest was not so much the dog-thing as the fact that several others saw the beast and genuinely seemed to think that it was absolutely adorable. I chalked it up to the old "no accounting for taste" maxim.

Have you ever seen something like that, something so pathetic or pitiful that you begin to wonder how anyone could develop an affection for that thing? The answer, of course, is that you have – you just didn't know or recognize it as such. In fact you see it every single day.

Our text for this morning will explain. That portion of God's Word according to which we will be guided and instructed this morning is found in the Gospel of Luke, the 7th Chapter:

^{NKJ} ***Luke 7:37-39, 44-50 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁴ Then (Jesus) turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. ⁴⁵ "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. ⁴⁶ "You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. ⁴⁷ "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." ⁴⁸ Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to***

themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

These are God's Words, perfect in every way. May God the Holy Spirit grant you the grace to trust that these are God's Words and to hear and learn from them accordingly. To this end we pray, "**Sanctify us through the Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

Have you figured out what in the world you could have seen that is so pitiful or pathetic as to be more or less unlovable? The answer, of course, is that you see exactly that every day in the mirror. It's just that we have come to see what we see from a very biased perspective. In fact you and I have *never* been able to see ourselves objectively. We were born with a certain acceptance of self – a love of self. Oh we might wish that we were thinner, cuter, taller, or had more or better hair. We might long to be smarter, a better singer, stronger, wiser, or wittier. The fact remains that no matter what others might think, we are pretty enamored with ourselves. That's exactly why God – who obviously understood our own love for self – used that natural self love as the standard according to which we ought to love others when he said, "**Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.**" The statement *assumes* a love for self, and God doesn't make false assumptions.

Go back for a minute to that *thing* that I saw that someone claimed was a dog. Interesting to think what that dog would have thought (if dogs were capable of such thoughts, of course) when *he* looked at *me*. Probably not real impressed. What do you suppose he thought if he happened to see his own reflection? "*Hey! Not bad! Looking good today!*"

Silly? Only until you plug this scenario into our text for this morning. Only until you begin to contemplate how God sees you and me, day in and day out, and how he regards our pitiful arrogance, vanity, and self love. Then suddenly it isn't quite so silly any more.

In our text we are given a front row seat of what to most human eyes appeared to be a pitiful, shameless exhibition on the part of what was probably a prostitute, though we are not told just what sort of "sinner" she was. (The scene is beautifully represented on our bulletin cover for this morning.) The first point or truth here is that man and God saw this event with very different reactions: man as pathetic and unseemly; God as powerful and beautiful.

Which brings us to a powerful and insightful question that we all need to ask of ourselves this morning, and – more important still – which we

all need to answer honestly: *"Which would you prefer – to be beautiful in man's eyes or beautiful in God's eyes?"*

We know instinctively, of course, that the *right* answer we all want to give is that we want to be (and we want all of our actions to be) beautiful in God's eyes – even if we are seen as pitiful or pathetic in man's. That is, course, the *right* answer. Is it the *honest* answer? Is it always an *accurate* answer, day by day as we walk through life?

I can't speak for you, but I can give you *my* honest answer: *"I want everything that I do to be both. I want everything that I do in life to be acceptable and beautiful to both God and man."* This is my true, honest answer; I also recognize it as absolutely impossible. Why? God himself said in Isaiah 55:8-9, **"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.** ⁹ **"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."** In other words, God and man will almost *never* see things the same way. Man worships beauty, strength, pride – things like that. God loves only those things that are done in faith, and such things almost always appear to human beings as the exact opposite of our ideas of beauty, strength, and pride.

With this in mind we take another look at the events of our text. In the eyes of the proud, dignified Pharisees this was truly a shameful spectacle. I wonder, more to the point, if you and I would have been somewhat or greatly embarrassed by the whole thing. The men there undoubtedly saw the woman as someone utterly beneath them – a loathsome creature to be used and discarded. They saw the outward appearance and felt wholly justified in despising her. Jesus saw a human soul. More than that, he saw an heir of heaven – a human being that would spend all of eternity with him in the paradise he would soon go to prepare. In fact he saw a human being with which he *wanted* to spend eternity.

If there is one thing I would have changed about the artist's rendition on our bulletin cover it would have been to make the woman less attractive, less beautiful. Everyone wants to be surrounded by good-looking people. Human beings are drawn to outward beauty. Most of us want to surround ourselves with it – both things and people. There was none of that with Jesus. He was not drawn to the woman's outward appearance. He loved her heart. You will recall God's words to Samuel in 1 Samuel 16: **"The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."**

Understand, however, that Jesus did not love this woman because of her loathsome past; he loved her because of her sinless present. She was

pure in Jesus' eyes because of her faith. Mankind today greatly misunderstands this about Jesus. They assume that since he loved sinners, he therefore was not particularly bothered by their sin. Such ideas take man to some very strange and evil places. We hear as much today when liberal churches, for example, tell us that we are to accept and embrace sinful lifestyles because Jesus did. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus' love for this woman was inextricably tied not to her sin but to her repentance. Hear again the words of our text: **"Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'"**

How ludicrous to imagine that Jesus would have said the same things to this woman had she proudly marched into that dining room and with an unrepentant heart demanded that Jesus accept her as she was. We know this, in part, because Jesus by no means accepted the Pharisees as they were – those who still clung to their sins and failed to acknowledge Jesus as their Savior. In fact with them it was just the opposite. With them there was no pronouncement of forgiveness from Jesus. Clearly they didn't feel any need for forgiveness, and therefore they had none of that sort of love for their Savior. From our text: **Then (Jesus) turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."** In fact they even denied Jesus' power or ability to forgive sins at all: **"And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'"**

This is the difference, isn't it? Here we see the stark contrast between what man sees as beautiful and what God sees as beautiful; what man sees as acceptable decorum and what God sees as acceptable decorum; what man sees as pitiful and what God sees as pitiful. Here again we need to ask ourselves the question we asked previously and be honest about the answer: *Where would you most want to find acceptance – in the eyes of God or in the eyes of man?*

The bottom line here is that we are just plain fooling ourselves whenever we imagine that God does not see us as we truly are. How pointless to put on airs or play-act in our dealings with God. God, again, sees the heart. He knows full well that we are not naturally

lovely and desirable. We are, in fact, despicable, loathsome creatures. Apart from Jesus Christ we are exactly as those Pharisees regarded the woman who prostrated herself at Jesus' feet. That is the natural "apart-from-Jesus" reality as God sees it; as God sees each one of us.

But then Jesus changed all of that. He didn't change the outward appearance; he changed the reality that God sees. He did this by paying our sin debt when he gave his perfect life on the cross of Calvary. He supplied absolutely everything that is good in God's eyes and then credited that goodness to us as a gift.

What then is required of us? Nothing. That's the whole point. The woman in our text came to Jesus in utter humility – absolute, "I've got nothing" meekness. And THAT Jesus saw not as pitiful but as beautiful. And that is always and only what God sees as beautiful in you and me – when we fall helpless and tearful at his feet with no strength, power, dignity, or merit of our own.

When you and I come to Jesus in that way, there is no sin that can separate us from our Savior, no evil misdeed in the past that could exclude us from heaven or prevent his love for us. In fact this is *exactly* what our God wants to see in and from us – the acknowledgement of helplessness and the absolute abandonment of any personal goodness, merit, or deservedness. *"Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling. Foul I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die."*

What an absolute joy and comfort true Christianity really is. Pitiful is when we claim any goodness in and of ourselves – pathetic in the extreme in God's eyes because there is no such thing. Beautiful is when we fall in abject humility at his feet, acknowledging that we have nothing but inexpressible thanksgiving for the One who alone can and does supply all that we need. Fall at Jesus feet with hearts filled with such things, and know with unwavering certainty that the words he spoke to the woman in our text are also then directed to you: ***"Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."*** Amen.

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Proverbs 9:1-10** Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; ² She has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table. ³ She has sent out her maidens, she cries out from the highest places of the city, ⁴ "Whoever *is* simple, let him turn in here!" *As for* him who lacks understanding, she says to him, ⁵ "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. ⁶ Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding. ⁷ " He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, and he who rebukes a wicked *man only* harms himself. ⁸ Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; rebuke a wise *man*, and he will love you. ⁹ Give *instruction* to a wise *man*, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just *man*, and he will increase in learning. ¹⁰ "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.

NKJ **Galatians 3:10-14** For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." ¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for "the just shall live by faith." ¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." ¹³ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree"), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mr. Michael McEnroe, President (224-8335) Mrs. Eileen McEnroe, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor mjroehl@bis.midco.net Miss Suzannah Miller, Organist

The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 13, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#8- (Red Hymnal)

"Father Who the Light This Day"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Proverbs 9:1-10) Our first lesson speaks of wisdom. This, in itself, ought to cause each of us to sit up and take notice. Who doesn't want more wisdom? Who doesn't want to be wiser in his or her choices and decisions? Who doesn't want Godly wisdom to be able to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong? Here again, it all begins with God.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 45 (Page 32)

The Epistle Lesson: (Galatians 3:10-14) Our Epistle lesson this morning lays out the simple messages of law and gospel – sin and grace. Simple though these messages are, they represent the very heart of the Christian faith and they convey a message that should never grow dull in our ears, for herein lies the mystery of God's plan for our eternal life.

The Confession of Faith – The Nicene Creed – Brown Hymnal page 5

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#753- (Brown Hymnal)

"Let the Children Come to Me"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 7:37-39, 44-50 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"When Pitiful Is Beautiful"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Pre-Baptism Hymn -#300- (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Blessed Savior, We Are Here"

The Baptism of Margaret Amanda Anderson

The Post-Baptism Hymn -#300- (Verses 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Blessed Savior, We Are Here"

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #316- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#785- (Brown Hymnal)

"Children of the Heavenly Father"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (50) 2010 Average (52)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Fond du Lac has called Pastor Paul Nolting. Loveland has called Pastor Todd Ohlmann. Pastor Terrel Kesterson has returned the call to Red Wing. That congregation has now called Joel Fleischer. Pastor Luke Bernthal has accepted the calls to Valentine, Mission, and White River. The CLC Convention is scheduled to convene in Eau Claire one week from tomorrow.

Entrance Closed Monday-Wednesday – Due to the construction on E Divide, the church parking lot is scheduled to be closed from Monday through Wednesday of this week. If you need to get into the church during that time, please park in the vacant lot to the east of church.

Looking Ahead – Missionary David Koenig is scheduled to deliver a sermon and Bible Class here in Bismarck on Sunday, July 18, as part of his furlough duties when he is here in the States. Please mark your calendars and make every effort to attend.

Baptism This Morning – We rejoice this morning at the miracle of Holy Baptism. God's Word, connected to simple water, is a means designated by God himself through which He works saving faith – even in little children. So also we rejoice in that miracle as we witness the baptism of Margaret Anderson – daughter of Michael and Laine.