

## Drawn to Jesus: Four Encounters (Luke 7:1-17; 36-50)

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*Luke 7:1-17 (read earlier in service)*

*1 After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. 4 When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, 5 for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." 6 And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; 7 therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. 8 For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go," and he goes, and to another, "Come," and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this," and the slave does it." 9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." 10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.*

*11 Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. 12 As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. 13 When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favorably on his people!" 17 This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.*

When we gather together for Communion, one of the things that I'm reminded about is that we're a family – and just like any other family I know, while we love each other, we don't always agree about everything. And I want to say something about that as we have transitioned to one worship service today.

- First, I appreciate the way our church leadership handled this. They gave everyone an opportunity to be heard and voice our opinions, and then a decision was made based on that. I appreciate the transparency and openness in knowing that about 80% of us supported having one service for this season that our congregation is in.
- Second, none of us got 100% of what we'd like out of this change. Either the time of the service isn't what we'd prefer, or the worship music style isn't quite our thing, or something like that. I'm right there with you in that. But this is a great time for us to be reminded that worship isn't about us; it's about coming into God's presence... about listening to what God has to say to us. Of course, the timing and worship music style are important in helping facilitate that, but let this be a reminder to us that when we come together today and in the future, the focus should be on God; not us.

- Finally, today is the first Sunday of October. Does anyone know what the month of October is in church life? It's pastor appreciation month. I'm not bringing this up for my benefit, because I'm just a fill in, but I encourage all of us to do something this month for Melissa and our interim ministers who are leading and serving in this season. It's been a challenge for them, and they could use your encouragement.

And everything that I've just talked about, those are marks of a church that people are drawn to... a church that is attractive to people. And with that said, we'll continue our sermon series on being Drawn to Jesus – focusing on some of the things that attracted people to Jesus 2,000 years ago – and that still attract them (and us) today.

The last two weeks we've focused on what Jesus said and did in Luke chapters 15 & 16, but today we're going to rewind a bit earlier in Jesus' ministry, and look at Luke chapter 7. Luke 7:1-17 was read earlier in the service, and I want to recap what we heard...

In the first instance that someone was drawn to Jesus:

- The Centurion – a gentile who would not normally associated with Jews, and a professional soldier and commander for the Roman army “...heard about Jesus” (v. 3)
- The Centurion was humble and had also shown kindness to the Jewish people – as the Jews lobbied strongly that it was this man “built our synagogue for us” (v. 5)
- The Centurion realized that Jesus didn't need to be troubled further, and asked him to “only speak the word” (v. 7)
- Everyone was amazed at the Centurion's faith – he was someone who understood authority and he knew enough of Jesus to realize that he had ultimate authority – and the slave was healed.
- Keys to pay attention to from the Centurion: Jesus' reputation; humility and faith; his belief.  
\*Jesus was the one sought out, and Jesus responded.

In the second story in which a different person was drawn to Jesus:

- A widow whose son had died (meaning she had no one left; she was completely alone) was in a funeral procession in a large crowd...
- Jesus saw the situation and “had compassion for her” (v. 13)
- Jesus brought life from death, and “word about him spread” (v. 17)

So in one instance, Jesus was specifically sought out due to his reputation and the faith of the one seeking him. And in the following situation, no one was seeking Jesus, but he just happened to be in a position to meet a need without being asked or sought out. And that leads us to the third encounter we'll look at together today...

This next story is another encounter between Jesus, a Pharisee, and an uninvited guest - but in this instance the primary Pharisee mentioned – Simon - seems to be genuinely interested in truly discovering who Jesus is and what he's all about. It's very much like – in your dating years – you met someone that you wanted to spend some time getting to know better – so you invite them out for dinner.

### **Luke 7:36-50**

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. 37 And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's

house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. [38](#) She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

[39](#) Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." [40](#) Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak."

[41](#) "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. [42](#) When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" [43](#) Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly."

[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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. [45](#) You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing 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 were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." [48](#) Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." [49](#) But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" [50](#) And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

In this passage, we see two more people whose lives are impacted by Jesus... A Pharisee named Simon who was a devout religious rule follower, and a "woman in the city" whose name we don't know but who is described as "a sinner." Simon was approaching Jesus somewhat like a detective; he was trying to find out if Jesus was really the great prophet and religious authority that some people said he was.

Have you ever approached Jesus like that? Trying to figure him out... testing him and his life to see if he is really worth your faith and trust, or if he's not?

And then there's the sinful woman – someone whose life has obvious already been touched by Jesus. We don't know that details, but we can infer that Jesus has done something that has made a profound impact on her... so much so that she is in tears as she expresses her gratitude in the only way she knows how at this moment.

Have you ever approached Jesus like that? With so much thankfulness in your heart that you couldn't keep it together? That Jesus had done something so meaningful that you just had to do something to express your gratitude?

As a side note, many of us don't relate to this woman... we've never felt so guilty, so distant from God, so in need of forgiveness – that we've been reduced to tears and an impulsive act to show our immense thankfulness. And while none of us should want to be in that situation where we're in such need of extreme forgiveness, it should open all of our eyes to the joy and true salvation that someone who has that kind of background can experience. It's a big reason why people who are baptized as adults seem to be so much more grateful and emotional during their baptism than children who are baptized.

Jesus of course realizes that his Pharisee friend is struggling to understand what is happening, so Jesus tells a simple story about forgiveness that has this main point:

- “I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” (v. 47)

For many years, my spiritual life was described by those final words: “To whom little is forgiven, love little.” I had lived a life that was mostly good. I hadn’t committed any of the sins that really get peoples’ attention or are the ones we consider to especially bad. But several years ago I developed a hidden sin that only God and I knew about. And it grew. It was something that kept me from being completely honest with my wife and honest with others. Even though my secret behavior wasn’t impacting anyone else, I realized that if I was ever going to be honest in any area of my life, I was going to have to deal with this. So I continued to talk to God about it, and I realized that I needed to confess it to Carolyn as well or nothing would change. So I did. And Carolyn responded with grace and forgiveness. And that was the moment in my life when I really understood what Jesus was talking about in verse 47. I had been forgiven for something big, and as a result my response – my gratitude and love to the one who forgave me – was so much bigger than it had been before.

I hope that your life has been relatively spotless and pure, but I know that all of us – if we’re really honest – have those things we struggle with that hurt ourselves and hurt others, and that also weaken our relationship with the God who loves us. So be encouraged, even if you’re in the midst of that darkness right now. Through Jesus, you can experience the type of profound forgiveness that you might think is impossible.

Today we’ve seen how four different people in very different circumstances were Drawn to Jesus...

1. A military leader who knew he needed Jesus humbled himself and asked for help – he sought Jesus out, and it was his FAITH in Jesus that led him to do that.
2. A widow who was DESPARATE, alone, and in deep sadness didn’t seek Jesus out, but he found her and – in his compassion – provided what she couldn’t even think to ask for.
3. A Pharisee – a religious man who was curious about Jesus – shared a meal with him to get to know him better, and he was challenged by what he discovered. But the point is that he was drawn to Jesus to INVESTIGATE who he really was.
4. And a nameless woman – a sinner who was drawn to Jesus because of the FORGIVENESS he gave her – expresses her love and gratitude in an extravagant way.

Are any of those things the thing that first attracted to you Jesus? Or is any one of them what still attracts you to Jesus today? And as we think about those outside of our church family, what do you think it is about Jesus that attracts people to place their faith in him today?