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Luke 7:36-50  
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### Slowing Down to the Speed of Love

Let me set the stage for our scripture today. Jesus had just healed a Roman Centurion's servant. Raised a widow's son back to life. Cured many people of their diseases and sicknesses. Delivered people from evil spirits. And gave sight to the blind. Then he fielded questions from John the Baptist's disciples who wondered if Jesus was the Messiah.

Needless to say, Jesus was busy. He was extremely busy. In great demand of everyone. But not hurried. In our story today, we see that as busy as he was, he still had room for his opponents and for those many might consider a nuisance. Notice the care and attention Jesus gave to each, as he slowed down to the speed of love.

Join me as we read from Luke 7:36-50.

**36** One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him. So he went to the Pharisee's house. He took his place at the table. **37** There was a woman in that town who had lived a sinful life. She learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house. So she came there with a special jar of perfume. **38** She stood behind Jesus and cried at his feet. And she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair. She kissed them and poured perfume on them.

**39** The Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this. He said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him. He would know what kind of woman she is. 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 lender. One owed him 500 silver coins. The other owed him 50 silver coins. **42** Neither of them had the money to pay him back. So he let them go without paying. Which of them will love him more?"

**43** Simon replied, "I suppose the one who owed the most money."

"You are right," Jesus said.

**44** Then he turned toward the woman. He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water to wash 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 has not stopped kissing my feet since I came in. **46** You did not put any olive oil on my head. But she has poured this perfume on

my feet. **47** So I tell you this. Her many sins have been forgiven. She has shown that she understands this by her great acts of love. But whoever has been forgiven only a little loves only a little.”

**48** Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

**49** The other guests began to talk about this among themselves. They said, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

**50** Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

The late Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama in his book, *Three Mile An Hour God*, wrote, “God walks slowly because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is ‘slow’ yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore the love of God walks.”<sup>1</sup>

As we look at this story today, I’m curious about Jesus’ slow speed of love. How does it show up, or not in the way the Pharisee and the ‘sinful’ woman interact with Jesus? How do we see it showing up in the way Jesus interacts with them? How might we slow down to the speed of Jesus’ love ourselves?

Let’s first look at how the Pharisee and the ‘sinful’ woman interact with Jesus. The Pharisee, who’s name is Simon, offers his home, a meal, and a chance to recline. But this was not his best. According to biblical tradition, the minimal gesture of hospitality would have included washing a guest’s feet since wearing sandals on dirty roads would have made their feet quite dirty; greeting their guest with a kiss as a sign of friendship, respect, and peace; providing oil for their heads (olive oil with spices and perfumes were often used to refresh a guest after a journey); and sharing a meal together would be a sign of peace, trust, and community.

Failure to offer these basic courtesies would have been considered offensive. So I believe that this gives us a window into Simon’s heart. He wasn’t really interested in welcoming Jesus as a true guest. He considered Jesus someone as less than worthy of his minimal hospitality.

Now Mark and John in their gospels share some interesting tidbits for us to consider. Both say that this occurrence took place in Bethany, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Mark recalled it occurred at the home of Simon the Leper. John reported that it took place at Lazarus’ home with his sisters Mary and Martha. I

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<sup>1</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile An Hour God* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2021), 8.

wonder if it truly was at Simon the Leper's home, could he have been one of the people Jesus had healed? If so, then this ungrateful display of hospitality would have been even more egregious.

But what about the woman in the story?

Luke described her as a 'sinful' woman. Mark simply called her a woman. John named her Mary, his good friend Lazarus' sister.

Regardless, in Luke's story, she barged into Simon's home, uninvited. Not because she wanted something from Jesus. But because she had something to offer him. In Mark's Gospel, we hear that this offering was an alabaster jar of pure nard, a very expensive aromatic oil extracted from plants in India. This perfume extract would then be mixed with olive oil before it's use. The jar was a sealed flask with a long neck that had to be broken to reach it's contents. Once the seal was broken, it had to be used.

Not only that, but Luke told us that this woman was so overwhelmed by Jesus' presence that she wept, using her tears and hair to wipe the dirt off his feet. Then she broke open the flask to anoint Jesus' feet with the perfume.

We can just imagine the stir and dismay this sight would have caused the onlookers. First because, public affection of this sort from a woman toward a man who was not her husband was highly inappropriate. And second, because the jar of pure nard was worth well over an entire year's wages. To the onlookers, and especially the Pharisee, it seemed like a huge waste of resources. Everyone besides the woman and Jesus felt very uncomfortable. It even makes me feel weird.

Regardless, which of these two would we say offered true hospitality to Jesus? The 'sinful' woman. Not Simon the Pharisee.

We have already established that Jesus was extremely busy. Constantly on the go, moving from this town to the next. But though he was busy, he never seemed hurried. He always operated a slow enough pace as to respect the humanity of others.

Catholic theologian Matthew Kelly writes, "Busy reduces our capacity to love. Busy is a destroyer of love. Busy robs us of so many opportunities to love and be loved. Busy dehumanizes people - ourselves and others - and the result of that dehumanization is reduced capacity to love. Each dehumanizing experience diminishes our future capacity to love, and most of us have been dehumanized much more than we are aware. This downward cycle desperately needs to be broken. We need to slow down so that we can learn to love again."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Kelly, *Slowing Down to the Speed of Joy*,

We see this in how Jesus accepted Simon's invitation to come over for a meal. Even though by this point, he most certainly knew Simon's assumptions of Jesus, as a glutton and drunkard, a friend to tax collectors and sinners.

We see this in how Jesus didn't complain about Simon's improper welcome. Jesus graciously received the gifts that both Simon and this woman offered.

We see this in how Jesus welcomed both people into his presence without shame or judgement.

We see this in how Jesus never made this woman feel like she was an interruption to his more important agenda with Simon.

We see this in how Jesus knew Simon's thoughts about Jesus and this woman's interaction before he said anything.

We see this in how Jesus lovingly taught Simon a parable which provided space for Simon to figure out his own shortcomings.

We see this in how Jesus forgave this sinful woman her sins.

We see this in how Jesus extended her peace.

My friends, these are not actions of a busy, hurried person. But of one with enough margin built into their busy life to gracefully deal with interruptions and challenges when they occur.

How might we slow down to the speed of Jesus' love?

First, we need to acknowledge where we are and from what speed we typically operate.

"Michael Zigarelli from the Charleston Southern University School of Business conducted the Obstacles to Growth Survey of over twenty thousand Christians across the globe and identified busyness as a major distraction from spiritual life. His hypothesis:

It may be the case that (1) Christians are assimilating to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload, which leads to (2) God becoming more marginalized in Christians' lives, which leads to (3) a deteriorating relationship with God, which leads to (4) Christians becoming even more vulnerable to adopting secular assumptions about how to live, which leads to (5) more conformity to a culture of busyness, hurry and overload. And then the cycle begins again."<sup>3</sup>

John Mark Comer describes something called hurried sickness which is a pattern of continually rushing and being anxious. A person might feel chronically short of time and so performs every task faster and tends to get flustered when delayed.<sup>4</sup>

Here are some indicators that we are way too busy and hurried.

We are always in a rush. And never on time.

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<sup>3</sup> Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> IBID, 46.

We are a stressful presence. We bring chaos to the rooms and situations we enter.

We give only halfhearted attention to the person before us in the moment.

We give only a portion of ourselves to anything.

If we are eating a meal with family or friends, we are preoccupied with our plans for tomorrow or something that happened earlier today.

We are always somewhere other than the now.

We are always hustling as fast as we can to get from one place to the next.

We live at an insane pace.

We do everything halfheartedly.

We have no sense of how much activity is enough for a single day.”<sup>5</sup>

Again John Mark Comer suggest four basic Christian practices to unhurry our lives.

The first practice is silence and solitude. Last week, we established that the busier and more in demand Jesus became, the more he retreated to quiet places to be alone with God so he could hear God’s voice more clearly. When Jesus came out of his times of silence and solitude “he had all sorts of clarity about his identity and his calling. He was grounded and centered. [He was] in touch with God and himself. From that place of emotional equilibrium and spiritual succor, he knew precisely what to say yes to and, just as importantly, what to say no to.”<sup>6</sup>

The second practice is sabbath. We are here today because we want to honor the sabbath as God commanded. It’s not that we do it for the Sabbath’s sake. We sabbath for our sake. We need one day of seven to stop creating, producing, making things happen, answering email and text messages...to rest. To leave our unfinished business in God’s hands trusting that he will take care of it when we cannot. On the sabbath we stop or shabbat “to delight in the world, to delight in ourselves in the world and to delight in God.”<sup>7</sup>

The third practice is simplicity. Jesus had a lot of things to say about money and stuff. Most of us have too much of it. Our stuff owns us. But when we engage a more simple attitude toward material things, we are able to give them away more freely. The woman in our story today is a perfect example of one who generously gave away what most people would hoard for themselves. She saw her wealth as an opportunity to bless Jesus, not as something to spend solely on herself.

How can we practice simplicity? John Mark Comer suggests the following:

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Kelly, *Slowing Down to the Speed of Joy, The Simple Art of Taking Your Life Back* (Cincinnati, OH: BlueSky Sparrow Publishing, 2024), 48-49.

<sup>6</sup> Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 126.

<sup>7</sup> Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 155.

Before buying something, ask, ‘What is the true cost of this item?’

Before buying, ask, ‘By buying this, am I oppressing the poor or harming the earth?’

Never impulse buy.

When you buy, opt for fewer, better things.

When you can, share.

Get into the habit of giving things away.

Live by a budget.

Learn to enjoy things without owning them.

Cultivate a deep appreciate for creation and simple pleasures.

Recognize advertising for what it is - propaganda.

Lead a cheerful, happy revolt against the spirit of materialism.

And finally the last of his four practices to unhurry ourselves is slowing down itself.

Walter Adams, spiritual director to C.S.Lewis said, “To walk with Jesus is to walk with a slow, unhurried pace. Hurry is the death of prayer and only impedes and spoils our work. It never advances it.”<sup>8</sup>

So perhaps, drive the speed limit.

Get into the slow lane.

Come to a full stop at stop signs.

Don’t text and drive.

Show up ten minutes early for an appointment, without your phone.

Get into the longest checkout line at the grocery store.

Reconsider how you use your smart phone.

Get a flip phone or ditch your cell phone all together.

Parent your phone; put it to bed before you and make it sleep in.

Keep your phone off until after your morning quiet time.

Set times for email.

Set a time and a time limit for social media (or get off it)

Kill your TV.

Single task.

Walk slower.

Take a regular day alone for silence and solitude.

Take up journaling.

Experiment with mindfulness and meditation.

If you can, take longer vacations.

And finally cook your own food. And eat in.

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Adams quoted in John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (NY, NY: Waterbrook Publishing, 2019), 25.

Now we certainly should not expect ourselves to do all of these things. The idea is not to be legalistic like the Pharisee. But maybe pick one you sense the Holy Spirit is inviting you to try for a while. See if it sticks and how it slows you down a notch.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent which is a perfect time to put a new slower practice into motion. As we reflect upon the love of Jesus and the sacrifice he made for us, we are invited to sacrifice as well, by seeking silence and solitude, practicing sabbath, simplifying, and slowing down to the speed of love.

So may we not rush through life at such a pace that we overlook small invitations from the Lord to enter into whatever he might be doing in our midst. May we see that when we do slow down, we love others in the same way we want to be loved. And may we know that maturity takes time and unhurried perseverance as the Holy Spirit transforms us more and more into the slow, loving presence of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Fadling, *An Unhurried Life, Following Jesus' Rhythm of Work and Rest* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 147.