Smells Like Grace

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Date: 25 January 2026

Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0:00] Well, hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana.! And as always, if you want to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, today we're just excited to get into the Word of God, but most of all, let this Word get into these hearts and transform us into the image of our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Now, I want to share with you where we're kind of at in our series called Good News. This is week number four. The message is called Smells Like Grace and it's taken from Luke chapter 7, starting in verse 36.
Now, have you noticed that there are certain good smells that immediately take us back to memories that could have happened decades ago, maybe even from our childhood?
I remember as a kid, there was a perfume my mom wore called Sand and Sable. You remember that? And when I would lay in her arms as a small child and she would rock me to sleep, that's what I smelled.
[1:07] And so honestly, that scent became a fragrance of comfort, security, even love to me. And I remember years later, my mom changed perfumes. And listen, I haven't talked to her since.

No, I'm just kidding. Now, how many of you have ever heard of something called ambergris? If you were to walk along the beach and discover this, what looks like a rock at first, this waxy rock-like substance, you may notice a sweet, very strong smell.
In fact, eight-year-old Charlie Naismith was strolling along the beach in New Zealand when he found a unique looking rock. Well, after discovering a powerful smell coming from it, they figured it out.
It's ambergris, this incredibly rare substance that's essentially whale poop. That 1.3-pound rock that he found wouldn't have smelled good at first, but after potentially years of floating in salt water, being in the sunlight, it was then sold for $65,000 as it's used in high-end perfumes to make the smell last longer.
In fact, in 2021, a fishing crew off the coast of Yemen drug in a deceased whale, and because they were aware of ambergris, they cut it open and discovered a 280-pound piece of this substance that netted them $1.5 million.
[2:33] And while this one was more fresh and stinky, they came out smelling like roses because they weren't poor fishermen anymore. So it's fair to say that finding a healthy piece of this rare substance smells like financial security.

But today I want to share a cool story from the Gospel of Luke where this sweet fragrance that we're going to talk about smelled like grace. So grab your Bibles. You could even grab the Holy Glow of your Bible app on your phone.
And let's start turning in the New Testament to Luke chapter 7, and we're going to start in verse 36. As you're getting there, just, hey, welcome back to week four of our series in the Gospel of Luke called Good News.
And you know what? In a world full of hatred, heartache, frustration, and uncertainty, I'm thankful we have, remember that word, the euangelion? That means the good news of Jesus Christ that changes everything about our lives.
And so far we've talked about following Jesus' example, resisting Satan's temptations, standing on the word of God. We've looked at Jesus' miraculous haul of fish that led Peter, James, and John to leave it all behind, following him into a life of purpose.
[3:50] And that invitation extends to us as well. Last week we sang about the wise and the foolish builders and discovered life when we choose obedience, building our foundation on Christ, the only

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good foundation that holds up.

So kind of like that whale in Yemen, let's dissect this passage today and discover some valuable truth. And here's the first thing. And I just want to let you know again that if you would like to access our sermon outline, you can always go to the YouVersion.
That's Y-O-U-Version Bible app. Amazing resource, absolutely free. You can download that on your phone, your tablet, whatever. And then if you go to the menu and you go to events, you'll be able to click on our church, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, and you'll be able to see the outline, take notes off to the side.
But I want you to see first that the sinner, and I'm putting sinner in quotations, the sinner smelled like grace. And if we look at the context around this story, Jesus had been pretty busy since he last told us about the wise and foolish builder in Luke 6.
He's healed a high-ranking centurion servant. He raised the widow's son from the dead. John the Baptist sent his disciples to make sure Jesus really was the Messiah.
[5:12] And with their own eyes, they saw him give sight to the blind. They saw him heal the lame and make them walk. Lepers were cleansed. The deaf could now hear.

The dead was raised. And the good news was proclaimed. Yes, he is the promised Messiah.
Meanwhile, the Pharisees, a self-righteous sect, probably on the more extreme conservative side, a self-righteous sect of religious leaders, they were rejecting Jesus.
They were looking for any opportunity to discredit him, to conspire against him. And here's honestly another failed attempt to trap him in his words as we start here in Luke 7, verse 36.
The Word of God says, When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.
As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.
[6:27] When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know who's touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.

Okay, so let's paint this picture. It was common when a rabbi was coming through town, that a guest rabbi, whatever, that other religious leaders would invite them over to discuss kind of the cultural issues of the day, to discuss theology.
It was also common that they may open the doors so that those who weren't invited to the meal could stand around the perimeter and listen to these scholars talk God's Word.
I've even heard other scholars suggest it could have been an outdoor space, like we might call like a patio, where others could have gathered around outside and heard what was being talked about.
And Jesus, knowing the intentions of these hard-hearted men, he's reclining at the table with them, always ready to preach truth. And in their culture, they didn't sit in a chair like we do.
[7:33] The table was low. They would kind of lay on their side, on their elbows, and their dirty feet would be the opposite end. It would be as far from the table as possible as they ate and spent time together.

That's when we're introduced to a woman. And this woman lived a sinful life. And while we can't know this for sure, that phrase sinner or sinful life, it implies that this woman is known all over town for her immorality.
It was no secret. And there's a high probability this meant that she was a prostitute. That's also what church tradition teaches throughout the centuries. Or at least she was a notorious sinner known for her sexual promiscuity.
And I personally believe that this probably was her job because of some of what this passage says.
And this lady coming into a Pharisee's house, even coming into onto the property, would have broken all the societal norms of the day because they didn't associate with what they deemed the worst of society, this woman of the night.
Now, let me get kind of technical for a couple minutes here, and then I promise it's going to make sense and we're going to bring it home. In verse 37, there is a Greek phrase that's used here, which is kai adu, kai adu, that leads off that sentence, and it simply is the word behold, which means, in the Ray Sweet paraphrase, hey, something shocking, something unexpected is about to go down.

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[9:10] And here stands this woman who's been shamed for years, who you would think would be the last one to want to come into the presence of a bunch of religious leaders. And yet, something's already changed in her heart.

And we're about to see her response to the amazing grace that Jesus has already lavished on her. And you might say, hold on, Ray, how do you know she already received grace?
Because she's not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. She just shows up with no name in this story. And by the way, this is not Mary Magdalene. Two different stories at two very different points in Jesus's ministry.
So let me show you something really cool. If we jump down a few verses and we have a little spoiler alert moment, in the first part of verse 47, Jesus says, therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven.
So let me just share one more Greek phrase because this is really important and then I'll quit nerding out on you, right? The verb phrase, so have been forgiven, is a perfect tense verb.
[10:14] And all that means is it's an action that was completed in the past and it has continuing results into the present. So she had already been forgiven and now we see her outpouring of intense gratitude back to Jesus.

So apparently, the Apostle John was right when he wrote in John chapter 21, verse 25, he said, Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose even the whole world would not have enough room for the books that would be written.
So Jesus had already encountered this lady that's not recorded. Like John said, man, there wouldn't be enough room if we recorded everything. But Jesus already lavished grace on her life that, to put it nicely, had not been well lived to this point.
I'm guessing she had been wounded deeply, whether it was abuse or abandonment, tragedy or rejection, something had happened in her life to cause her to go down such a destructive, sin-filled, rebellious path.
And yet, he met her in that nasty sin. He met her in her shame, her rebellion, hopelessness, her lack of self-respect. And he brought life.
[11:31] Hear me. This is the heart of the gospel, the good news. If you're listening to this day and you too are filled with a similar guilt and shame and self-hatred and despair, you don't have to keep doing this.

Jesus wants to meet you in this moment just like he did with this woman. And he alone changes everything when we come like this lady with a truly repentant, remorseful heart, surrendering to him. And here she is. Where many would say that she shouldn't be, and yet to the Savior of the world, she's 100% welcome. And I love it.
And if we can live with the heart that she had in this moment of just absolute worship and surrender, intense gratefulness before Jesus, if we can live that way, there'll be no regrets.
I mean regrets. I have to tell you, I get so much joy. Now, let me finish the sentence before you think I'm odd. I get so much joy seeing someone clearly lost and everybody around them knew it for years, notorious for their rough lifestyle.
[12:40] Then Jesus changes everything about them and their life is full of abundant fruit. Now you have other lost people watching this saying, dude, what happened to you? And you know what the answer is?

Jesus happened. And he can do that same transformation in you too. And I love this simple quote. It was said about 125 years ago by a professional baseball player turned evangelist named Billy Sunday.
He said this, The law tells me how crooked I am. Grace comes along and straightens me out. And now we see the fruit of this unnamed lady's salvation in the form of her worship and her sacrifice to Christ.
Whereas the smug Pharisees, they're over here in their pride and they didn't show proper respect. They didn't give Jesus the water to clean his feet. And here she comes, overcome with emotion. And this passage actually reads like the rain of her tears. So the tears are flowing heavy. Her tears of gratitude with those she washes his yucky man feet.
[13:49] And this is even more gross, but it shows her sacrifice. She dried them with her hair, getting whatever grime that's on those feet for these men who walked all day in the sand and the dust.

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She gets that in her hair. And then she does something even more amazing. She takes an alabaster jar of perfume. This would have costed, this would have cost them about a year's wage. And she pours it on his feet in an act of worship. You know, growing up, my dad was one of the best mechanics in Greensburg. And to do his job well, he needed good tools.
And my dad was a snap-on man. And there's a reason those mobile trucks are so nice. High dollar tools, big time money. But they were necessary for a mechanic who did this as a career.
Now for me to prepare messages like I do, to do my job, I need things like a laptop computer, certain programs on my computer, books like commentaries and word studies and all kinds of other stuff that help me to wrap my mind around a passage.
[15:00] And those things aren't cheap either. But they're necessary. They're a, what you would call a tool of the trade. Okay, so let's bring this back. If this lady was indeed a prostitute before she met Jesus, this high dollar, fancy jar from Egypt, filled with crazy expensive perfume, that was a tool of her trade.

Think about it. Smelling good was great for business, as sad as that is. But, when she pours out thousands of dollars on Jesus' feet, her actions are screaming loud and clear that it's time for a career change.
Because that's not who I am any longer. I am a child of the living God and I've been set free. So, if we put ourselves in her shoes, here's the question we have to answer.
What in my life needs to be poured out so Christ could be the King of my heart? Let me ask that again because I need to hear it. What in my life needs to be poured out at His feet so that Christ could be the King of my heart?
And listen, whatever God is convicting in our minds right now, let's write that down and let's deal with that. And yet, this self-righteous Pharisee named Simon, and this isn't Simon Peter, the apostle, Simon was one of the most common names in Israel.
[16:25] And so, I think there are like six or eight of these guys who are talked about in the New Testament who had the name Simon. This is Simon who's a Pharisee. And this guy, when he sees this, says to himself or thinks to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would know who's touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner.

Now, correction, Simon, that sinner, uh-uh. she's now a saint. Or in the words of Paul from 2 Corinthians 5, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, and the new is here.
Saints of God, aren't you glad that Jesus has wiped out every sin, that he's given us a new identity? And even going back to the power of smell, can you imagine being an onlooker there watching this unfold?
smelling that very strong fragrance the whole time you were there? And then every time, let's say in the future, you catch a sniff of that same perfume, where's your mind gonna go?
It's gonna go to the aroma of grace. That sinner smelled like grace. And listen, we can too. Now, let's keep going in this story, and let's talk second about the Pharisee who reeked of pride.
[17:44] And I need to give this disclaimer. The longer we walk with Jesus, and I know this may sound odd at first, but I'm telling you it's true. The longer we walk with Jesus, especially when we start to get a little lazy and we start to stray off the path a little bit, the easier it can sometimes be to fall into the trap of acting like a Pharisee.

And God brought something to my mind as I was preparing this. Years ago in ministry, I was kind of young in ministry at the time, a lady in the church did something that was very hurtful to me.
And while I've tried to forgive her, and sometimes it has to keep happening because you know how that happens. Those thoughts come back to your mind and the anger wells back up, right?
But while I've tried to forgive, I also, gotta be honest, I gave up on her at the same time, labeling her as someone whose faith was phony. Wanted nothing to do with her, even made mead-spirited comments any time her name would come up.
And as I was preparing this, the Holy Spirit brought her to my mind that while her actions were not godly and it wasn't okay what she did, He can still change hearts and I need to quit giving up on people acting like a Pharisee because I don't want to be on the wrong side of this story.
[18:59] And listen, I too am that quote-unquote sinner who now smells like grace because God has forgiven me only because of Jesus. How dare I switch places and start snarling at others?

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So yes, stand on truth, never compromise, but don't ever let that turn into self-righteous pride. Now, let's pick up here in Luke chapter 7 starting in verse 40 as Jesus responds to Simon's thought life. Isn't that scary? Imagine if someone was around you who could respond to your thought life, right? But Jesus is God, that's why He could do this. But He responds to Simon's either thought life or even the whatever He muttered under His breath that Jesus wouldn't have heard.
And He says this. Jesus answered him, Simon, I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher, He said. And then Jesus tells this story. Two people owed money to a certain moneylender.
One owed him 500 denarii and the other 50. Neither of them had money to pay him back, so He forgave the debts of both. Now, which of them will love Him more? Simon replied, Why suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven?
[20:11] You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Then He turned toward the woman and said to Simon, so He's looking at her, talking to Him. He says, Do you see this woman?

I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered does not stop kissing my feet.
You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. You know, another biblical reason we believe Jesus was God and wasn't just another prophet or good moral teacher is because He reads Simon's thought life here about how He viewed this woman made in God's image.
Calls her a sinner. And He tells him a story to counteract his wrong thinking. One guy owes the moneylender about a year and a half's worth of wages for a common laborer.
And so, I mean, it's impossible to know exactly how much money that would be in our culture today, but it's probably roughly $50,000 to $80,000 in spending power. The other owes him around two months' wages or probably $5,000 to $8,000.
[21:19] And the lender, I mean, this should be shocking in the story, the lender graciously forgives the debt of both of them. Now, if I owe $8,000 and someone forgives that, trust me, I am extremely grateful for sure.

Great gift. But $80,000? Man, I'm over the moon. I'm celebrating. I can't believe that someone would be that kind, that gracious to do that.
And then Jesus asked Simon, which one will love the moneylender more? I guess the one who was forgiven more, Simon says. That's right. And yet, that's not the point of the story.
Three things Simon didn't do for Jesus, showing his lack of respect. He didn't provide water to clean his feet, as was customary. Number two, he didn't welcome him with a kiss on the cheek, a sign of respect in their culture.
And number three, he didn't put oil on Jesus' head, which was often used to moisturize, clean, and protect skin and hair from the hot sunlight and the dust that they kicked up as they walked. So those were common hospitality practices for honored guests, for rabbis like Jesus.
[22:27] And yet, this woman, who had been forgiven much, she washes his feet with her tears. She wipes it with her hair. She kisses his feet.

Instead of inexpensive olive oil, which would have went on their head, she pours expensive perfume on his feet. She goes the extra mile because she realizes the massive sin debt that she could have never repaid.
I'll never forget, never forget, early in ministry, the church we were at was growing, the Lord was doing some really cool things. People who had never darkened the doors of a church building were coming.
They felt loved. They were hearing the gospel. They were responding by faith, surrendering to Jesus' lordship. And one day, as the church was full again with several new faces, a man who had been there for probably 50 years that I love, he made this sad comment.
He said, I'm glad we're growing, but these are the wrong kind of people. Now, I'll be honest, I grieved. I really grieved over that comment as a young pastor who was probably a little naive to how church people can often think when the Bible really isn't their worldview.
[23:43] So, whether you call that pharisaical, sanctimonious, holier-than-thou, or self-righteous, not good. And this was the attitude of Simon and his buddies as they had become experts on following the rules while still having cold hearts, going through the motions with no sincere love for the Lord, addicted to power and control more than sincere love for their God.

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And I think the late John MacArthur hit the nail on the head. He said, these self-appointed guardians of legalistic, external, ritualistic religion hated Jesus' message of grace, repentance, and forgiveness and his call for sincere love of God from the heart.
They also hated him for pointedly rebuking their hypocritical self-righteousness and for associating with outcasts of society. And listen, I'm not here to point and laugh at these guys who Jesus said would never enter the kingdom of heaven unless they repented.
That should be heartbreaking to us. It should cause us to fall on our knees and say, Lord, help me not to take my faith and turn it into a checklist that shows how great I am and how awful others are. Help me not to weaponize my faith and go around shooting everybody. Help me to always be mindful of the massive debt of my sin that was paid in full by the grace of God while never cheapening that or taking it for granted.
[25:09] help me to be like this woman who smelled like grace and not the Pharisee who reeked of pride. So, for these last few minutes here, let's share this.

Let's share this good news, okay? And it comes down to this. Grace is greater than my sin. You know, what I love about God's word is this fool of broken, sinful people that God transformed and he used despite their flaws and their rebellion.
Adam and Eve got it all started with disobedience of eating the forbidden fruit. Abraham lied about Sarah as his wife. Jacob deceived his father and brother to steal the birthright.
Noah got drunk and acted foolish. Samson's lust led him into immorality and ungodly choices. Elijah's lack of faith made him suicidal. David committed adultery and then the cover-up led to murder.
Jonah ran in disobedience from God's will. Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. Martha let fear and anxiousness keep her from focusing on Christ. What really mattered?
[26:14] Zacchaeus was a greedy thief. Paul persecuted the church with passion. And listen, we could go around our church family, every person listening to this right now, and we could say your name and a hundred things you've done and you could say the same about me.

But there's good news. Our sin is great and there's no need to make excuses for it. We're all guilty. Scripture is very clear. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
It's only by His grace and His grace is greater than our sin. Here's what Jesus said at the end of our story here in Luke 7 verse 47.
He says, Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little. Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven.
And once again, perfect tense, they have been forgiven in the past and that continues to today and even into the future. Jesus wasn't making a distinction that her sin really was so much greater than the Pharisees.
[27:17] That her sin was the 500 denarii and they were the 50. Not at all. They just thought they were so much better than her when in fact they were also the 500. They were simply too cold hearted and prideful to realize it whereas she willingly admitted hers and by faith she fell at His feet in total surrender.

See, we're all that person in this parable who owes a debt spiritually that is immense that we could never repay. Our sin is great but I'm so thankful that God's grace is even greater.
And if you have done exactly what Scripture teaches and you have heard the gospel message and you have believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that He is your Messiah and your God and you have confessed Him as your Lord and Savior, been baptized into Him, then listen, you are covered by the blood of Christ and it is as if you've never sinned because of His blood.
That's called grace. But the bigger question is this, will we choose to be more like this worshipful woman or the faithless Pharisee?
Will we deny our sin and keep checking our man-made boxes of superiority, doing it my way with no peace? or will the grace of God propel me to pour out whatever has held me back, walking just like this woman in the peace of God that passes all understanding, choosing to let the joy of my salvation lead me to a life of worship and sacrifice?
[29:06] So let me say this one last thing. May each of us, you and me both, may each of us smell like grace.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are so grateful for Your amazing love. Thank You for Your Word. May You stir it in our hearts and may we become more like Jesus.

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We pray in His holy and precious name. Amen. Amen. Hey, just want to give this invitation. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.
If you have faith questions, if you want to talk about the church or even how to give your life to Jesus, reach out to us at 812-663-8488 or ray at FCCGreensburg.com.
Hey, God bless you. Hope you have a great week.

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