

Service Overview

Speaker: Ben

Sermon Series: A Place At The Table

Message: A Place At The Table For Unexpected Guests

Scripture Reference: Luke 7: 36-50

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Service Welcome *Speaker: Worship Team*

A very warm welcome to you all today to Parramatta Baptist Church. We're going to start the service with three songs of praise and worship. We would love you to stand and please join and sing with us. So let us stand.

Worship Singing

Song: Fill This Place by Jake Espy, Jerrica Matrone

Mid-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Worship Team*

Let me pray for us. Heavenly father, that is our prayer this morning. We ask Lord God that you would come and fill us. Come and fill us individually. Lord God, by your Holy Spirit, we ask that you would allow us to set our eyes and our hearts on you this morning. That the hope and the love and the peace and the joy that flows from knowing Christ would be evident in our lives, and we ask that you would fill this church this morning, Lord.

We thank you that when we gather together, you are with us, and there there's power in your name, Lord Jesus. So we ask that you be here amongst us this morning, that these songs would be more than just songs. Lord, that this place would be filled with the praise and worship to the most high God. We thank you Lord that you are worthy of all of our praise.

You are worthy of every song, every note that is played, Lord God, you're worthy of so much more than a song. But we come this morning with what we have, Lord, and ask that you would fill us and fill our church with your presence. And thank you, Lord, that you're with us. We love you, Lord. Amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Holy Forever by Brian Johnson, Chris Tomlin, Jason Ingram, Jenn Johnson, Phil Wickham

Song: Who You Say I Am by Ben Fielding, Reuben Morgan

Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Reuben & Jo*

Reuben: Good morning and welcome to PBC, and a big welcome to those joining us online as well. My name is Reuben, and I'm one of the pastors in this church. How many of you came today expecting God to do something, anything? Something big, something small, something impossible? This morning, you know, there were testimonies shared of what God has been doing.

And really, that's almost a currency of our faith. When we hear words of testimony, that really raises the level of faith within us to believe God for more. And I just want to challenge you to just be really open to what God is saying this morning. And it's so brilliant being a child of God, where we can approach him and seek him and ask him for anything as his children.

And we have the strength of a huge, big God behind us to work in impossible situations. So I want you to think about that, because we're going to let the kids out soon, and what I would like is for you to turn to someone and just share one thing that God has done in the time that you've been at PBC. Now, even if you've been at PBC for one day, I promise you that from the time when we visited PBC for the first time two and a half years ago now, God was speaking in really quirky ways to us throughout the whole day. So I challenge you, even if it's your first time here.

--- Break as the congregation discusses together and the kids leave for kids church ---

Jo: Good morning, everybody. Sorry to interrupt your conversations, but, my name is Jo, and believe it or not, but in two weeks' time, our 10th annual art installation is happening. Can you believe it's been 10 years that we've been doing the art installation? So thank you to everybody who has contributed over the years. And can I just say that, it goes for two weeks, so if you're away during the school holidays, you've got the second week to come and visit the art installation.

And please make sure you bring someone along with you. We've got some invitations. If you didn't get one handed to you this morning, there's lots of them in the foyer. Grab an invitation. It's got the opening times on the back. The art installation is just the perfect opportunity to invite people who don't know anything about Jesus. It's a very, soft and gentle way for them to know a little bit more about who he is and for you to say which artwork spoke to you and to just have that conversation with them. So can I encourage you to think about who you would like to invite to the art installation?

Also, we do need help with opening and closing. So if you would like to volunteer, sign up using the sheet in the foyer as well. And if you're submitting something, artworks do have to be in my hand by next Sunday. But also, because it is our 10 year anniversary, we're going to celebrate and we're having a big, huge art sale to raise money for the new ministry centre. And that's happening on Saturday the 5th of October. We have beautiful canapes organised and mocktails. We've got some really lovely pieces of artwork for sale as well. So if I was you, I would be here on time on Saturday October 5 so you can get in and buy that beautiful piece of artwork before somebody else grabs it.

So again, perfect opportunity to invite someone along, especially someone who's never been to a church before. They can go to look at the art installation, have a drink, have a canapé, have a listen to the music and just be blessed. So will you come and celebrate with us on the 5th of October? If you have any questions, come and see me after the service.

Reuben: But yeah, it's going to be exciting, not just because Jo it. It's really amazing. And if you could see how many hours were put into each piece, I think that would be really interesting. The number of hours that went into everything that you see there. And if you added them all up, I wonder how many hours that would be.

As a church, we've been following God's leading and his vision for this community into planning a new ministry centre. This morning, the new ministry centre website is up. So you can go to the PBC website, and it'll be on the top right hand corner of the page, and it'll give you the latest updates on what's happening, what the space looks like, how you can pray into it and also how you can give. So that's fresh. The paint is still wet on that website as of this morning.

And we're having a newcomers afternoon tea today in the basement at 2:30. So if you're new to the life of this church, and you really want to get connected into your life here, you want to ask some questions, please come and join us. It's a really great time to connect. I've always been impacted by the stories that we that we hear from people on that journey as to how they got here. It's always, always really marvellous.

Prayer *Speaker: Reuben*

Can I pray for us as we prepare ourselves to hear God's Word? Thank you, loving father, for how you embrace us, how you're inviting us into the depths of your heart and to the abundance that you enrich our lives with in every aspect. There is nothing that's impossible for you. So, Lord, we just give ourselves to you this morning as we seek you, that you take any barriers away in our heart, in our minds, to hearing you clearly, to knowing your love as our loving father, as you rush out to embrace us with a love that like we've never known before.

We just say yes to your invitation, Lord, this morning. So won't you speak clearly? Would you bless Ben as he brings your word to thank you, Lord, for all that you're about to do in our lives. Amen.

Bible Reading: Luke 7: 36-50 (NIV UK)

³⁶ When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ 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.

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that 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 money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii,^[a] and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?'

⁴³ Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.'

'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said.

44 Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, '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. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.'

48 Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'

50 Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Sermon: A Place At The Table For Unexpected Guests *Speaker: Ben*

Thank you. Good morning and welcome to church. It's wonderful to be with you. My name's Ben, I'm one of the pastors here, overseeing our youth ministries, young adult ministry and evening service. A few weeks ago, maybe 3 or 4 weeks, we took our high school Friday night youth group, 'Arise', offsite. Usually we meet here, we play games, we open the Bible, and then we talk about it in small groups. This week we went offsite and we had a picnic. It's pretty bold for nighttime. And there were a lot of good things about this night that we enjoyed. We did ham cheese toasties on the public barbecue, and everyone loved those. They were delicious.

We had so much grass area, so we played some awesome LED games, people running all over, which we can't really do when we're here. And then also we had some different people doing different things throughout the night, engaging in ways they wanted to. So it's a really fun night and we enjoyed it. There are also a few really tough things about the night. One of the added realities is we don't control where the sun goes. And so the lights went out about half an hour after we arrived, so it got very dark. And our lighting solution didn't actually solve that problem, even though we tried. And then it's also an abnormal or strange kind of situation where I'm walking around for the two hours just making sure that everything's okay. You know, kids are staying in bounds, leaders are all spread out. Okay, cool. Everyone's okay. Right on two hours on repeat.

And add to that for me, in the first half, when I rocked up to the park, my hayfever just went crazy. And so before I got there, I was fine, but about half an hour in, I sounded like deathly ill. Like I just sounded terrible. And I felt terrible and all congested and headachy. So it was a long slog of a night for me. And by the time the night was coming to a close, I was very much looking forward to going home. And it was up to the last half an hour, I went in, I sat down on a hill looking over where the people were playing, and I sat next to one of the young people in my small group, one of the young guys I've been discipling for a few years now. And we just got into a conversation about life, his life. And he was just talking about stuff, and there's some really emotional stuff going on for him, and the hard stuff he's sitting with. And so we had a good chance to talk about like life, wisdom, self-care, a bit of discipleship in there as well. And I was really honoured just to share, like, "How does Jesus come into this?" and also to pray for him. I had written that night off, but I love that in that last

moment, God just opened a door for that conversation, and I walked away, grateful for what it meant for him. But I also walked away a little humbled and grateful that God isn't limited to my expectations. He's not limited to my capacity, and he's not limited to my skill. God goes well beyond that. He's not getting on board with my agenda. I get to get on board with his agenda, and I'm so grateful for that. It's a burden I don't think I could bear, and I would do an awful job at if I tried.

When I read the story from Luke 7, I was glad that God goes beyond the expectations, goes beyond the capacity, the skill, or even the understanding of people. This is a man, Simon the Pharisee, who in this story, his goalposts for what is appropriate, what's not appropriate, what's expected, what is not expected, are wildly different to Jesus'. And unfortunately, it means that he failed to understand some really cool things about the gospel.

But the good news is, Jesus isn't limited to people's expectations, capacity, or skill. And so we're going to unpack that story, and we're also going to move to explore how we carry the gospel to those among us in our weeks. But I just want to pray for us, and then we'll get into that. Heavenly Father, we invite you to speak to us. We posture ourselves to receive. Come and have your way, Lord. I've got some words on a page here, and I'll say them, but, Lord, we pray that you would be honoured and glorified. Would we look to you with greater clarity, conviction, and desire to honour you? And would you form us, your people, into your likeness? We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

So let's jump into our story. Right at the beginning of our story, the scene opens with a Pharisee inviting Jesus to have dinner. Now, this is Luke 7. Up until this point, the Pharisees are quite sceptical about who Jesus is, let's say. So this Pharisee who invites Jesus over, he may have been doing it because it was the polite thing to do. It might just be his turn to host the synagogue dinner. Who knows? But what we also know is he's not super clear on who Jesus is. So having Jesus over is a good chance to figure out, "Who is this guy? Is he who he claims to be?" And so the invitation goes to Jesus and he accepts.

Jesus goes to dinner and he reclines at the dining table. This reclining was customary. He's not being lazy or tired. In fact, it would have been dishonourable if he tried to sit at the table. But for the sake of this story, I think it's helpful to picture Jesus kind of lying on his side, kind of propped up, maybe on a pillow or on his arm, and he's kind of facing toward people and away from other people. Does that make sense? I think it's helpful to understand that for when the woman enters the scene and comes up behind him.

And so we're introduced to a woman in that town who lived what Luke says is a sinful life. And the specifics of that sin isn't clear. It doesn't seem to really matter what her history was to Luke in this case. But we can kind of gather that whatever the sinful life was, it had a public element to it. Because when Simon the Pharisee looked at her, he saw a sinful woman. And so this woman, known to be sinful, she learned that Jesus was eating at Simon the Pharisee's house. And so she came there where Jesus was.

Now the layout of dinners is very different to any dinner party that I have ever hosted. I'm going to be two really key reasons why. Number one is the doors were open so people could come inside and join the dinner. People who weren't invited could come inside and watch the conversation, see the people. If there was dancing or music, they could enjoy that as well. That's not like a dinner party that I've ever hosted, at least not at home, but maybe here. So that's one really key thing—anyone could come in.

The second thing is there was a separation of people in the room. Jesus was invited, so he got to sit at the table, recline at the table and eat. The other people who weren't invited, like the sinful woman, they could come, but they'd have to stand outside like the edges of the room, possibly even outside, looking through windows or doors. And so that's where the sinful woman belongs in that situation. Jesus is reclining because he's invited to the table. The woman came without invitation, so she's looking in from afar. And so she comes to this dinner, and she's not empty handed. She brings a jar of perfume which would have been immensely valuable to her. We're talking about months' worth, if not years' worth, of savings going into this incredibly valuable item.

And then we come to read an interaction that I have so many questions about. Like, I feel like I don't fully understand what's going on here. I would love to have a conversation with her. Maybe one day I will, but even though we don't understand everything that's going on, we can grasp that it's something deeply meaningful. This is a deep expression of affection. This is what we read, that as she stood behind Jesus' reclining at the table, she stood 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.

Luke doesn't capture any words from the woman. Actions seem to have spoken loudly enough, even though we're possibly left with questions. She is clearly deeply moved, in this moment with Jesus, and she performs this very honouring act of service toward him. This humble act of service, the expensive perfume, her tears, her hair, even her kisses are brought into this lavish and generous anointing of Jesus feet. What is going on for this sinful woman?

Well, as I said, we don't know everything that's going on for her. But if we take the full passage that was read out to us, we can understand a little bit of what is going on for her, especially how she's encountering Jesus. Later on, Jesus says these words to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven and your faith has saved you. Go in peace." It's very likely that this actually wasn't the first encounter that the woman had with Jesus. It's probable that her life was already impacted by the teachings and the ministry of Jesus in some way, and that this event of worship and response is a response to what Jesus has already done in her life. Does that make sense? That's a highly probable reality because it doesn't really make sense in isolation. Grabbing a jar of perfume and going feels a very intentional kind of thing to do. So it seems like it's a response to what God has done for her.

The actions of the woman are overt and show deep affection. But it's not received and enjoyed well by everyone in the room. Simon the Pharisee, the host, he looks at what goes on and he speaks to himself, saying, "If this Jesus was a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is, that she is a sinner." That's Simon's words to how Jesus should act in his expectations. And it feels a little bit harsh off the bat, but to understand what Simon's talking about, we need to understand some expectations that he held that informed his words.

So one really key thing to understand is that Simon expected prophets to stay away from sinful people. There's a few reasons behind that. Two really key ones are risk of infection, not like physical infection, but it kind of is like that, but in a spiritual sense that these people are unclean and sinful. And if I get around them, then their dirtiness and their shame is going to rub off on me. And so if he's a prophet, he knows what sin looks like, and he also knows to avoid it, lest he become unclean himself.

And the second thing that is behind the scenes for Simon is that the people who you hang out with was a sign of status. He would usually dine with and eat with and hang out with people of his status. Rulers would have dinner with rulers, they wouldn't have dinner with slaves. So in this context, prophets, as Simon expected, would have dinner and hang out with other religious leaders as well. There's kind of an expectation. And so by letting the woman at his feet, Jesus ran the risk of being infected with her uncleanliness of spiritual filth and shame. And he also risked the reputation of people seeing him as that lower status as that woman at his feet.

And so Simon did not expect a prophet like Jesus to mingle with sinful people. And unfortunately, his conclusion isn't to change his expectations, or to at least not straight away. His reaction or his conclusion is that Jesus is therefore not a prophet. This assumption was that if he was a prophet, he'd know who she was and he would stay away. And the sad reality is that Simon's poor expectations in this case have actually stopped him from grasping a really cool element of the gospel, and that is who is invited.

Throughout the course of his ministry, Jesus chose to eat with tax collectors, those who were outcasts by society because of their deceit and their betrayal and their hunger for money at the expense of others. Jesus touched people who were sick and had been pushed away by society and were on the outer edge. He taught everyone who would come to him, not just the religious elite and the powerful. And when he did this, the Pharisees asked him, "Why? Why are you doing this?" Jesus response to them was pretty simple. He said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

And so as we rewind back to Simon's expectations, if you are around others who are sinful, you actually might become unclean. Jesus is turning the tables and saying, "I'm not just not becoming unclean. I'm going in there to restore people. That's my mission. And so I'm going to look for those people who are sinful, for those people who are unclean, because the irony is whilst you think that's

why I'm not a prophet, that's the purpose that I've come for." The tables on Jesus are very different to Simon. The gospel is for all people. Everyone is invited into relationship with Jesus. Everyone is invited to receive salvation and life through Jesus.

Currently, we are working through a series, exploring the invitation that we carry into the world. An invitation for people to come to the table with Jesus alongside one another to a place of spiritual healing, of restoration, of hope, wholeness, abundance and life. And the list goes on. And the focus of this series is very much toward those who don't know Jesus. How we can share the invitation with those who are among us during our weeks, where we find ourselves in our sin places?

And so we've looked at how the table is a table of surprise with the water into wine. And we've looked at how the table is for all nations, not limited to certain borders or cultures. And today we're looking at the unexpected guests at the table. Did you catch who the unexpected guest was in this story? Yeah, the woman. Definitely unexpected by a bunch of people, but definitely unexpected by Simon. She wasn't expected at the physical table, and chances are she wasn't expected by them at the spiritual one either to be restored by Jesus.

Unexpected guests. Before we go any further, I'm going to use a chair, because I want you to envision the table in heaven with all the saints throughout all of time sitting around this table, eating dinner. That makes sense. I can't even picture that many people. But pictures that we have a table big enough and everyone is seated around this. Okay, this is heaven. And this is a chair. When I see chairs, I think of heaven. (*Ben puts a chair in front of him.*) This is a chair that people sit on for the dining at the table, and what I want you to do is picture us filling this chair in a moment, okay?

So this chair symbolises someone's spot at the table. The message of the gospel is clear in a few different directions. One, that we're not going to really press into a lot into this morning, is that with this chair, you have one waiting. Jesus actually invites you to the table, regardless of where you are, regardless of where you're from, you are invited to take a seat at the table because of what Jesus has done for you. You don't have to buy it. You don't have to earn it. Jesus has got it for you. And through faith, we're given a seat at the table.

Okay, so there is a there is a seat for you, but I don't want you to picture this as your seat. I want you to picture this as an empty seat. And my challenge for you is to go in your mind and think through the places you find yourself throughout the week. Maybe at your workplace, with your family or your friends. And I want you to find someone who you possibly or probably, at least in this moment, wouldn't expect to be sitting at this table. Try and find someone who you wouldn't expect to be sitting at this table.

Maybe it's someone who's told you they despise Christians and think Jesus is crazy. Maybe they hate organised religion and have vowed to never come to church. Maybe they've walked away from

church with really strong convictions, never to return. Maybe they refuse to listen to any mention of faith, or maybe they even think that you are absurd, coming to church, sitting here right now.

Try and think of someone. I'm going to give you a moment. Who is someone who you might not expect to actually take up the invitation to be at the table, but Jesus invites us to?

--- Pause as the congregation is asked to think of someone they know ---

This can be a hard thing for some people. I know that for some people in the room, it's a case of "There's people in my life who I feel like they've been unexpected for so long, and maybe they've been a person you've been praying and interceding for and hoping for so long that you're almost tired. Let's put them on the on the seat for now, even though they may be not expected.

Let's talk about the faith that we can have that Jesus can restore everyone and anyone. I wonder, can you picture someone for the chair? I can picture someone for the chair. I can picture a few people for the chair. In my life, there's one that jumps to mind, and our stories are actually interwoven in a really interesting way, and I actually carry a bit of guilt from the interaction of our lives. It was a close friend of mine who told me that a really kind of pivotal juncture in my life, that he was no longer Christian, and didn't feel like he could come to church anymore because it just was inconsistent with what he believed. And we'd grown up at church together. And at this point, we're very, very close friends and still are today. And we had had many faith conversations up to that point, and I knew that he was wrestling with some big questions.

And so when he walked away, I wouldn't have said it, but I carried a sense of blame toward myself. I saw my inability to convince him, my inability to make a case for the gospel. It's like I was frustrated with myself that I wasn't able to grab him and shove him in that chair, like that's what I was frustrated about, I myself, and I carried that guilt for several years. It impacted the way that I kind of shared faith with other people. And God began to bring that to my forefront in some strange situations and began to bring some healing to those spaces.

But I realised in hindsight that what I was doing was trying to bring him and make him sit down in my own strength. I was trying to convince him with the smooth words or great ideas or fantastic apologetics. But I realise now that that really is not enough. There's a verse that stood out to me. It's this one in 2 Corinthians. *"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is in the image of God."* And I've read that and I release I was trying to force him in this state and trying to unveil, in this spiritual sense of blindness, that I actually have no power over. I am not powerful in that sense. I'm not capable of doing that on my own.

And so when it comes to seeing someone sit in this chair, I'm so conscious that we are fully dependent on God to initiate and to breathe into life and make that happen. Our role is not absent,

like he does use us in that. We do extend invitations to the table. We do explain what it means to be at the table to receive salvation in Jesus. That's part of what we can do and what he asks us to do in being salt and light. But ultimately, the work of salvation lies in the hands of God. And so he invites us to depend on him.

We're not done yet, but I want to stop to pray just out of acknowledgment that that we are dependent on God. And so whoever you put in this seat right now, I just want you to picture that person in that seat. I'm going to pray, and then we're going to keep going. Okay. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we know you are powerful and you stand above all things. And as we talk about the work of salvation, we know that it's beyond our capacity, beyond our control. You are the creator of all, you know our most inmost being. You know where our hearts are at, and you know where the hearts of the people who are sitting in these chairs are at. And so we pray your blessing over those people.

Lord, we desire for them to come to know you in rich deep life-bringing ways. For the hard hearts, Lord, we ask you, Lord, would you do a profound softening and replace hearts of stone with hearts of flesh as they move towards you? For the searchers who seem to be searching elsewhere, getting further and further away from you, we pray that Lord, you would encounter them wherever they are, and draw their attention back to you.

We're out of our depth on our own, and so we really do depend on you, Lord. We lean into you and we beg you, Lord, would you bring these people into your presence? Would you bring them and draw them to the table? Come and move, empower, because Lord, we know your grace is enough. Your mercy is sufficient. No sin is too messy, no brokenness too devastating for you to restore. So come Jesus. Bring your kingdom. Redeem your creation. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Before we go, I just wonder if you have the faith. I don't know where you sit to believe that God can do that. Sometimes we picture people and we go, "I just cannot see it. It's really hard to even believe that God can do that." And I think that's a matter of faith in God that he can, because God does crazy big things, he's still in the business that he was 2000 years ago. That's the same God doing the same stuff today. And I believe that God is going to keep on doing crazy stuff. And I reckon he wants to raise our level of faith in him that he can do this. And we've seen it in those stories up on that wall and I very much anticipate that is not the end of the story. God is still in the business. There are going to be more people, unexpected people responding to the gospel.

And I'm really conscious of the need for faith, the need to trust in God in this. And so, I think one of the ways that we really encourage our faith is through stories. And we have lots of stories up on the wall. I'm not going to tell you any of those stories. I'm going to tell you stories that are 2000 years old, in the hope that this will impress on you the nature of our God, that he is powerful and that he redeems even the most seemingly far gone and unexpected person to sit at the table.

There's a story of a man who hated Christians so much that he was hunting them down. He was sanctioned by his religious leaders, his peers, and he was on a mission to throw all of these Christians into jail. And so when he was walking on this mission, very much intending to lock him up and find them and stop them from spreading the gospel, he's on a road, and a light comes and blinds him.

He hears a voice come from heaven. He learns that it's Jesus asking him, "Why are you persecuting me?" He then follows Jesus instructions. He goes to the town. God sends a person to him to heal him, to give him his sight back. And when this disciple of Jesus comes and restores his physical sight, there is a spiritual sight that is also restored. The blindness has left.

We see the transformation that happens in that man as he goes from what is probably the most voracious hater and hunter of Christians into one of the strongest leaders and propellers of church growth. His name is Paul, and his story is a testimony that how God transforms even the hardest of hearts for his glory. If God can do this for Paul, he can do this for anyone.

Another story Jesus was sailing around. He came to a region of the Gergesenes, and he gets out of the boat and he's met by a really shocking sight. And this is of a man who had neither been wearing clothes or even living in a house for a long time. He had been chained up and guarded, but he had ripped through his chains. Imagine the scars that would leave, being able to rip through chains, the blood that would be left, and then the shame and the disgust of the people around him and the fear of the people who are around him.

Profound. No one would go near him. He was pushed outside. And Jesus comes up to this man and he notices, as Jesus does, with the lens that he sees the world through, he knows this man is possessed by demons. And so Jesus comes up and he commands those demons to leave the man. Jesus casts them out and restores the man back to his right mind. And the transformation that happens in that man is so significant, so evident, so profound, so obvious, so massive, that the people from the surrounding towns, they come and they see this man, they see him in his right mind and they are just in awe. They are in awe, and they're even in fear because obviously some great power has done this.

A man who is shamed, disregarded, judged, I don't know, add your own words, but he was left out by society. His life was horrible and beyond his control. And Jesus restored him, healed him, and brings him back into his right mind. This is evidence that our God is more powerful than any spiritual force. He's able to restore, to redeem. If he can do that for that man, he can do that (*Ben gestures at the chair in front of him*).

Jesus Christ is the son of the most high God, and this was his practice. No man was too far gone, no woman to be broken, no sinner too messed up. The ones who were furthest from God, the ones

who were who were hated by society. The ones who were outcasts. It would never too far for Jesus. And they still are not. *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* That's the kind of God who restores, who loves, whose grace is lavished in profound ways over even the most unexpected of people.

And the Gospels demonstrate this rhythm of Jesus. He was softening hearts. He was drawing people to himself, even the most unlikely, and transforming all kinds of people. And he was finding great joy in it as well. And he also seems to suggest in the story that we're reading, those who are forgiven for more actually have a greater sense and a greater measure of love, because they are so much more keenly aware of the significance of the forgiveness in the salvation of Jesus.

I wonder, do you have the faith that God can transform that unexpected person that you named before that's in your mind? And maybe it's more than one person. Do you have the faith that God can soften their heart and draw them to himself? What a beautiful image that even the most unexpected person can come in and be a part of our church family, and their song of praise, their testimony of worship, makes our unified song of praise to God just that much more rich.

Do you have the faith? In the words of the man who met Jesus in Mark "I believe, Lord, help my unbelief."

Post-Sermon Prayer *Speaker: Ben*

Let's pray, because, Heavenly Father, we, we need you, your grace, so lavish and profound, so abundant. May we receive for ourselves salvation in your name, life, and a seat at the table. And that we look at our world through your lens and through your heart. You desire to see people come to know you and to be restored by you. So we pray for the unexpected.

But would you draw them in? Would you envelop them into your body? The church? Would they come to know you in life giving ways? Would you restore what needs restoration? Would you fix attentions on you that need it? Would you draw hearts and soften them to what you have? And I pray, Lord, that as we bring these people, invite them and welcome them into community, that our worship would just be so much more profound and richer for it.

Help us to desire that which you desire and to believe and have faith. Lord, for the things that you are capable of doing, even though it's beyond our capacity and our skill and our control. For every story to be written, expected, unexpected, we give you the glory in Jesus' name. Amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Death Was Arrested by Adam Kersh, Brandon Coker, Heath Balltzglier, Paul Taylor Smith

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Reuben*

Let's pray. Thank you for your grace, father. Thank you for your everlasting love for all of us. Lord, I ask that you empower us by your Holy Spirit, to keep in mind the people that we have a burden for.

Lord, we give you the guilt that we have that we might have of not being able to do enough for them. And we give that to you, Lord, in your power, in your leading. Once you tear down the obstacles of them knowing your love, would you work in our hearts and lead us on powerfully, that nothing is impossible for you? And so we give that to you for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conclusion *Speaker: Reuben*

Oh, that was great. There will be a prayer team up front with lanyards to pray with you over anything, whether it's a boost of faith or impossible situations. I would love to pray with you. So bless you all. Have a great week.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*