

A GOD-SHAPED VOID

When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and 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.

Luke 7:37-38

How this woman must have loved Jesus! How grateful she must have been to Him! The Bible says she was a sinful woman – promiscuous – maybe a prostitute.

Gabor Maté, an author and well-known physician working on Vancouver's downtown eastside speaks about the down-and-out people he works with – the addicts and the prostitutes. He tells about how almost all the women he treats tell him about the abuse and neglect they suffered as they were growing up. He talks about the great hunger these people have for "something," though in most cases they know not what. And, though Maté himself is not a Christian, he identifies this hunger as a hunger for God. He says there is a God-shaped void, or hole, inside these troubled people, a hole they seek to fill through alcohol, drugs and promiscuity.

Maté understands this hunger, because he himself has an addiction of sorts as well. He can't keep himself from buying classical music CD's, though he has more than he could ever listen to.

- Do you have a hunger too?
- Can you put yourself in the place of this woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil?
- What do you think Jesus did to motivate her to respond to Him in this way?
- Where did her tears come from? Can you relate? Have you ever felt this way?

I believe this woman must have felt very unlovable and unworthy. Think of how much she must have hungered for love – real love – not the physical desires she gave into! Maybe she didn't even know that the kind of love Jesus showed her was possible. Maybe she didn't even know that this is what she had longed for all along. Maybe Christ's love was a surprise gift – unasked for – given though she hadn't even imagined she could ever be loved in this way. She was overwhelmed.

Do you ever remember a time when you were very young and you had been separated from your mother for too long? Did you cry with relief when she returned? They were tears at being re-united with a person who loves you and could care for you. I believe those are the kinds of tears this woman had.

I cried a lot when I was a new Christian. In church the tears flowed every Sunday as we sang the hymns. Looking back, I can see they were tears of gratitude and relief – relief from the stress and the pain. I realized that I didn't have to do life on my own anymore. I was united with Jesus, a person who loved me with a love beyond measure. I know others who have had this experience as well.

- Can you relate to this?

I believe the woman found, not only forgiveness of her sins, but a healing. Now she realized that Someone wonderful loved her and could care for her.

There are times when I'm emotionally unstable – when depression threatens – that I truly hunger for reminders from my closest friends that they love me.

- Does your mood improve when you're shown you're loved by the people most important to you?
- Is the knowledge of God's love healing for you?

I believe we find healing if we can accept and appreciate how very much God loves us. But His great love is hard to fathom. The presence of Him and His love is something I often try to feel and truly be aware of. Sometimes I get hold of it for awhile, especially when I sit quietly outside in nature, doing nothing much but reflecting on the beauty and saying "Thank you, God!"

When we're feeling hungry – feeling like we have a need (a hole or a loneliness) that we don't know how to fill, we'd do well to remember Jesus' own words in John 6:35:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."