

"He would know that she is a sinner"
Luke 7:36-50

This is of course the second Sunday in advent. It is such an amazing time of the year, a time for family, a time for friends, a time to celebrate. With Christmas around the corner, I'm sure the preparations are well underway. Focusing on the family traditions, putting up the Christmas tree, getting all the Christmas shopping done, wondering about and planning the meal for Christmas day... What a wonderful time right. And in the midst of all the joy and the celebration, the one thing that is so often overlooked in today's society, one person that we think about but not as we should, is the person of Jesus. Jesus, who should be the central focus during, at the very least, this time of the year, is sometimes nothing more than a periphery character, someone we glance at over there, while we focus on what is going on here.

And this is somewhat true of what Luke records in this passage. There are three characters he mentions, there is Simon the Pharisee, the unnamed woman and then there is Jesus at the very centre of this moment. Luke, in recording this incredibly beautiful passage, makes a very important comparison or distinction between these two people, Simon the Pharisee and the unnamed sinful woman. One being self-righteous, seeking to analyse and understand the person of Jesus in the most logical way possible, but cannot see Him for who he truly is nor what He has truly come to achieve, the other, humble, seeking simply to worship Him, to glorify Him, to be in His presence.

I wonder what thoughts went through Simon the Pharisee's mind as Jesus entered his house to have dinner. Possibly, many questions were raised in his head, "Is this Jesus really who He says He is? Could this lowly man really be the Messiah? How could I possibly find out if He is, and if He isn't, who then, is He? The Son of Man? The Son of God? A simple carpenter, made crazy by a spirit? Who is this Jesus?"

Clearly, the mind of Simon was racing. He has it remarkably easy though, he invited Jesus to dinner, and Jesus accepted. He could easily speak to Jesus in the comfort of his own home, surrounded by people who respected him, people who revered him for his position. The ease of this encounter was far greater I believe for Simon than it was for almost anyone else present. As the Lord Jesus entered his house though, it would have been customary, and normal hospitality, for Simon to greet Jesus with a kiss, to have Jesus' feet washed, and for Jesus' head to be anointed with oil... but there was nothing. Nothing of the sort from a Pharisee, a man who knew the customs and traditions, a man who should have exemplified and reflected the very nature of God. Simon, I believe though, could not see who was sitting before him, who it was that was reclining at his table. His only concern at this point is highlighted in **v.39, "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."**

At the very least, Simon's view of who Jesus was, was simply that Jesus would have been a prophet, and in his view expressed in this one single verse, we have a glimpse into the mind of the great Pharisee. As was the norm, holiness was something that could be achieved by one's own abilities, that is to say, Simon's view was that he, in his own strength and ability, was able to gain holiness and he would have sought holiness by refraining from both sin and the sinners. This I imagine was a view held by so many before Simon and in Jesus' interaction with this sinful woman, it solidified the understanding in Simon's mind that Jesus could not even have been a prophet as He would and should have known the woman's past. If He were a prophet, He would have and should have, in Simon's eyes, stayed away from the woman. His focus is not on Jesus, rather, it is on what is happening around Jesus. It is on his own ideas, his own ideologies, his own righteousness... all of this, amounting to tunnel vision, losing sight of Jesus. And it is this view, this understanding, this behaviour, that gives way to a desperate, sinful woman's desire, to meet the Saviour.

While Simon has things relatively easy in meeting Jesus, for this woman, meeting Him is no simple and easy task. From this passage it is clear that her sinful past is well known to Simon, probably well known to all those who were present at this dinner. It is possible, and probable, that she would have heard about Jesus' ministry, she would have heard the claims about Jesus and she clearly believed these claims. So much so that she deeply desired to meet Him, to honour Him. She could not invite Him to her own home, that is if she owned one, as this would have been highly inappropriate for the time and the circumstances surrounding her sinful life and so, uninvited, she enters Simon's house and waits for Jesus there.

Notice though, that as Luke tells us, she has with her an alabaster jar filled with perfume. This suggests that she was there with the sole intention of anointing Jesus. Imagine the look on her face when she saw that Simon did not have Jesus' feet washed. But dirty feet did not stop her. I want you to just picture this for a moment: Jesus, reclining at the table, His back turned to her as He speaks to Simon, she leans over Jesus feet and as she kisses them the tears roll down her face. The tears rolling over the feet of Jesus and as they do, they collect and carry the dust from the street as well, and using her tears, she washes the feet of Jesus, something that she most definitely could not have planned for. Imagine this, she takes her own hair, according to 1 Corinthians 11:15, the most glorious part of her body, and uses it to dry the feet of Jesus. She then anoints His feet with the perfume. All of this, not done quickly as if to get an unpleasant task over and done with, but methodically, slowly, humbly, in an act of worship, as she continues, according to v.45, to kiss His feet.

What do you think this cost her? Yes, there is the physical monetary value of the jar and the perfume, but also the humility to kiss, wash and dry the dirty feet of Jesus. No doubt, there would have been a fear of being scorned and rejected by the Pharisee as well as the other guests present, but this did not deter her... she would not waver in her desire to meet and anoint the Lord, to worship Him, and this desire was far greater than the fear she must have felt.

You see, self-righteousness can never amount to true worship, it can never lead to true repentance because as the word says, it is all about the self. But the moment we come to Jesus, humbled, knowing and understanding that we are sinful, knowing that He is more than simply a periphery thought, when He becomes our primary focus, is when true worship and repentance can happen. No one is more accessible to a sinner than Jesus, and He invites us, day after day, into His presence, offering us forgiveness, grace and mercy.

My question of course is where do we fit in? If we placed these two characters on a scale, where would we find ourselves, as a church as well as individual people? Have we become like Simon the Pharisee, seeking separation from the so-called sinners? Have we become so self-righteous that we have lost sight of the understanding that we too were once alienated from God, that we were, as Paul puts it when speaking to the Philippian church, enemies of the cross of Christ? Do we look down upon those who we view are beneath us in status, looks, wealth? Have we pushed Jesus to the side so that we can focus on other things? Or are like the unnamed woman, who seeks nothing more than to worship the Lord? Who seeks a life of repentance, a new life through Christ Jesus? Do we overlook the short-comings of the sinners around us because we know and understand that we are in the same boat? Do we focus on Jesus?

At the end of the day, we need to take a step back and look at who we are and what we value. We need to look back and remember where we were without Christ and worship Him for where we are now because of Him. In Christ we have been forgiven, and this is through faith, not a sense of self-righteousness. Either we value His grace given to all those who come to Him in repentance and worship or we value what we can achieve in and of ourselves.

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