

JESUS HONOURS AND FORGIVES

LUKE 7:36-52

Meeting Jesus in the Gospels

OPENING PRAYER

Jesus of Nazareth, Strangers came to you because with you they knew that they'd be known. May we who are strange find each other and may we find welcome in each other and in this welcome find life. Amen.

EXEGESIS

This text is an exquisite study in character - not only characterisation, but the quality of character. Simon the Pharisee has invited Jesus to a meal. Little detail is given about the purpose of this meal. At the table, an interruption happens and an anonymous woman makes her own way into the house and begins weeping at Jesus' feet, wiping his feet with her hair. She has a bad reputation in the town.

What is important to note is that Simon does not judge the woman in this text - she's already been judged by him. Her character is, in Simon's mind, already decided. Simon judges Jesus. "If this man were a prophet..." Jesus is being judged by his association with the woman or, one could say, by his tolerance of her tainting touch. This fits in with the major project of Luke, whose gospel has been introduced as an orderly account of the things that have "been fulfilled". Jesus, in Luke, is a prophet on his way to Jerusalem, but the quality, purpose and characteristics of "Prophet" are being redefined in Jesus.

In order for the woman to be behind Jesus, with her tears falling on his feet, Jesus would have had to have been lounging, not sitting on a seat. This anonymous woman is at his feet, weeping. Jesus turns to her and asks Simon a question. In so doing, his head would have been turned from his host towards the woman who was an unwelcome guest in the house of Simon. He asks "Do you see this woman?" This question has come after Jesus has told a mini parable to Simon, involving two people whose debts were forgiven. The one who had the greater debt would have a deeper love for the creditor. So, in asking the question "Do you see this woman?" Jesus is asking a question both of social hermeneutics as well as self-knowledge. He's asking Simon "Do you only see your judgment of this woman?" and "Do you only see this woman's tainting touch?" and "How do you see yourself?" Jesus honours the woman's touch, her tears, her lips, her hair, her intention, and in so doing honours her capacity and expression for and of love.

REFLECTION

"Do you see this woman?" This question of Jesus' is extraordinary. So often the anxieties that fracture our societies are affected because of our failure to see the other person. Rather

than seeing them, we project our judgment, or our fear, or our hostility onto them. So they are never seen for who they are, but for who they, in our mind, represent.

Who is “they” and who is “we” in this context? It is moveable. Each person has the capacity to be the perpetrator and victim of marginalisation. Jesus’ question here draws us to the heart of the matter. Do we have the disposition, character and capacity to see someone for who they are, not for who we have made them out to be?

This woman is, in the text, considered to have a damaging reputation - damaging for herself and those she associates with. Rather than validate such a viewpoint, Jesus honours her, pays homage to her courage and is disposed toward being blessed rather than burdened by her great love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Who is it today that is treated in the way this woman was treated?
- 2. What, in your imagination, motivated this woman to enter the house of Simon in search of Jesus?
- 3. Who are the characters in this text, and what, in your opinion, informs the characters in this text?

CLOSING PRAYER

Closing Prayer
Jesus of Nazareth,
In the gospels we read that you saw those around you.
May we be seen and may we see.
May we be transformed in this seeing.
Amen.

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