

Forgiveness

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between June 12 to June 18 Inclusive

June 13, 2010, Third Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 7:36-8:3](#), The Message; or [Luke 7:36-8:3](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart, Luke 7:36-8:3](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Let us use our imagination for a moment. You have seen this scene in such TV programs like Rome, or some movie about ancient Rome. Picture the room when the dinner is being held. A group of men is at a table and they are eating in the Roman style. See them on a couch. That means two people on a couch, this is so intimate conversations can happen. Those who get invited are the elite of the village - those who are learned in the Law. High level of conversation. Behind them are the outsiders, who can only approach in supplication.

The first thing to ask is why this Roman style of eating? It tells us much about the context of Luke's story. This means those there had become captive to the culture of the oppressor.

Simon, a man of wealth has offered Jesus a tainted invitation. Jesus is on display as this quaint rural rabbi, new on the scene. There is a disdainful attitude. They know he has been making a fuss in the area. He is known to be suggesting that the kingdom of God is opposed to the Roman Empire.

Into the room bursts a woman, whose reputation is known to all. They are scandalized by her presence. First because she is a woman and this is not her place. Moreover because of what they know about her. She should not be there. Simon is contemptuous of her, suggesting she is a prostitute. She should not be there.

The scandal is increased as she pours out fine ointment. She touches Jesus' feet and wipes them with her tears, drying them with her hair. An act so intimate - personal. The most intimate act a woman could do to a man. Simeon responds with viciousness. In the protocol of the times Jesus should have responded with horror. And he doesn't. Simon is affronted by Jesus' response. As far as he concerned, he has been dishonoured.

Jesus recognizes the negativity around him. Jesus offers folk tale. He catches Simeon because Simeon knows the answer. He knows in a transactional world the greater the debt the greater is the forgiveness and the gratitude.

Luke wants us to identify with Simeon. He is rule bound. He knows what hospitality is. Yet he has not done what he ought to have done. He forgot the first rule of hosting. As well, he is repulsed by an act of Holy Hospitality. He is caught by his world view, what he thinks is proper religiously and socially. He has tried to domesticate Jesus.

Jesus welcomes the woman. He is not worried about her past. He is only concerned with her future. He responds in unexpected ways. This is the character of the God he worships. A God of holy hospitality where the boundaries are broken. A God whose first concern is Grace and forgiveness.

Jesus addresses the issue of need. What does this woman need? It is forgiveness and being thanked for her boldness. He reminds the listener that compassion and persuasion create an open future. This is a challenge to transactional values. Transactional values are where “if you do this for me I will do that for you.” No. It is a Grace that is given with no strings attached.

This confronts our tidy world where we like the transactional values. Like Simon we are challenged by this view of unlimited grace. Old habits are called into question. Old ways of thinking about the world are called into question.

When we identify with the woman we begin to see the power of love that takes us as we are. Sees within us a potential to love unlimitedly.

This is the power of the narrative for it gives us many viewpoints, and people to identify with. We are all the actors in the story. We are called to shift our identity. By identifying with Simon we can see the limits of his world view. When we identify with the woman our identity is expanded. She knows what she needs. She comes searching for healing even if causes disturbance. She has a boldness for she knows what she is doing has crossed the boundaries. She crosses over, demands inclusion.

It is important to feel this for there are many in our society who demand inclusion. Like Simeon we resist and hope those voices will be quiet - we say quietly, “Why don’t they stay in the closet?”

This narrative reminds us that Jesus knew her background and it did not matter. This is a difficult thing for us to understand. We have been schooled in the past creates our identity. The past is not our identity for in the economy of God it is the present that counts.

True, there are things in all of our pasts that we wish were not there. All of us have done things of which we are not proud. However, that is the past and the past does not determine the present or the future. It only does when we run on habits of the mind and habits can be overcome. Sure it is not an easy task to break destructive habits but we are not determined by them. An insight from cognitive behavioural therapy is, we can bring to consciousness and make visible those shadow sides of our experience. When we do, they are de-powered.

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

Jesus addresses the woman's need and she is freed. She no longer needs to live out of the past realities she has assumed and others have placed on her. Jesus says to her that her coming to consciousness has broken the bounds of the past and now go in peace.

Luke is maddening because here is another story that does not follow the woman to what she does with her life. It is enough for the moment of Grace to happen, the moment when we see the world in a new way. Now it is up to us to live in holy hospitality. And the good news is that redemptions continues in each moment.

When we feel deep down this persuasive love we can to risk leaving the past behind. We are not defined by our missteps but by our attention to the present. We can create a future for ourselves and for others.

We are not always comfortable with this view of reality. There are times we want others to pay for their wrong doing. We also like to feel guilty as a punishment for our failures. It is true that there are consequences for actions. We can see that in our ecological footprint on the world. We can learn from awareness of our actions and not be caught in old ways of behaving. We can create an identity of promise.

Beginning in redemption we can engage in constructive criticism. When it is applied to an art form, the artist gets better. It is a method of criticism which suggests what is done, is in one sense good enough and in what is done are the resources to make it better. A child gives a recital and the judge begins with the strength and moves to how it could be stronger. My friend who plays jazz has got better since he plays with someone who is has pushed him and pushed the boundaries. They push one another to excellence. Building on their strengths, and potential.

Redemption breaks those definitions that keep us in bondage. Being freed we offer the hand of freedom to others. That is now our identity - our passion - our vocation.

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