

Luke 7:36-8:3
Proper 6C
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A New Perspective

Classes on effectively teaching adults will typically tell you to first insure you set expectations — say what you expect them to learn — then teach them what they need to learn, then tell them again what they just learned. It's through this repeated telling, that things start to stick in our brains.

Luke is a great teacher. Some also call Luke a great story teller, which is also true. Great teachers are often great story tellers — they grab our attention and they can explain things, even difficult things, in ways that we can hold on to.

In this 7th chapter of Luke's gospel, there's been a repeating theme: who is this Jesus of Nazareth? For the Centurion and his servant, he was a long-distance healer. For those who witnessed Jesus restore life to the widow's son, some thought he was a prophet. For John the Baptist's disciples, there were questions about whether he was the Promised One.

And today we have someone new wondering about who is this Jesus of Nazareth. A Pharisee named Simon has invited Jesus to dinner, introducing us to the first of three people in this story: Simon, the host; the party crashing woman; and Jesus, the guest.

Simon sees the woman and quickly judges who she is; he sees a sinner.

Simon sees Jesus' interactions with the woman, his acceptance of her strange behavior, and Simon also judges Jesus. Jesus simply can't be a prophet! No prophet would allow himself to be touched by someone unclean, and certainly not in this unusual way. Simon's reaction is automatic. It's natural and logical according to how he looks at things.

But God does not see the world as we see the world. Jesus sees something very different, for he fully understands both the woman and Simon. And he knows Simon won't listen to a lecture about forgiveness, so Jesus begins with a parable about two debtors — one with a great debt, and one with a much smaller one — both of whose debts are cancelled.

"Simon, who will love the lender more?" And Simon gives the obvious answer: "the one who had the greater debt."

Simon is unknowingly trapped by the riddle. He hasn't seen the link between the parable and the woman, opening the door for Jesus to be more direct. Jesus points out Simon's behavior: how he had neglected his guest, was stingy in his hospitality, and failed to show love.

And while Simon's had not even met the minimum standards of hospitality, the woman had gone far beyond the norms. Her experience of forgiveness, her sense of freedom from the burden of her sins, had her overflowing with a joy that could not be contained. She expressed her love and gratitude without restraint, infinitely thankful for all that Jesus had done for her. She didn't care at all about what others thought about her eccentric behavior.

And as Jesus explains the truth of what he sees to Simon, he shows the Pharisee and us, that God's truth does turn everything upside down. We're challenged to see the usual way of acting — Simon's routine, polite, carefully planned and safe interaction with Jesus — as the behavior that appears odd, and the woman's strange and unfettered thankfulness and joy — as that which should be considered both normal and right.

After this time with Jesus, did Simon begin to see the uninvited woman in a new way? Did Simon open himself to seeing Jesus not only as a prophet, but as the agent of God's forgiving love? We aren't told these answers.

But more importantly, this gospel message dares us to hold up a mirror to ourselves and look closely — to examine our own perceptions, prejudgments, and interpretations. I imagine that if we're not seeing something of ourselves in Simon's actions, we're probably not looking closely enough. Perceptions can be tricky.

There's a classic black and white drawing which I've been told was created in 1915 by a cartoonist. There are more modern versions today. Some would call it an optical illusion, others a *pictographic ambiguity*. It's a single drawing that contains two different images within it, and depending on how you look at this drawing, you'll see a young woman or an old woman. It can be fascinating to see people react to this sketch for the first time. On my first encounter with it, I clearly saw the profile of a tired old woman, a woman with a large nose with a visible bump. Perhaps it was a wart! And that's all I saw. But others saw an image of a lovely young woman who was looking away from her viewer. They saw the long eyelashes of her one visible eye, her hair swept back and half covering her ear. Why couldn't I see this young woman? I needed others to show me, to help me see this image from a different perspective, to open my eyes to another way of seeing. Just as Simon needed Jesus to help him see, we too need Jesus, to see the truth.

How do we see ourselves and how do we perceive others? It can depend on how clearly we see Jesus, on how well we know Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus was not and is not a keeper of the status quo. So if we feel like we have an inside track to salvation, because we, just like Simon, are righteous, good, regular church-attending Christians, we're missing the point of the story.

Jesus wants us to love God with abandon. He asks us to love our neighbors — to see them, to interact with them, to welcome them as blessed children of God. Like Simon, we need to relook at how we perceive others, rethink what we assume.

Can we grow to see beyond our own social lens, questioning the truth of how we perceive gender, race, and nationality, age, class, religion, and culture — and try to intentionally see one another through Christ's eyes?

Can we move beyond the rhetoric and find solutions to care for refugees and immigrants, to address the inequity for the marginalized within our justice system?

Can we see others who are not part of the majority, who may be different than us without judging...seeing them as beloved of God, made in God's own image?

Like Simon, our perspectives, the way we see things, may need to be shaken up. We may need to be called out on our view of others, on our view of the world. Sometimes we need to be pushed beyond that familiar, automatic, and habitual way we think of ourselves and of others with that blur of familiarity, and instead, actively seek out, with God's help, the truth of what we are meant to see.

For we are all sinners, Simon, the woman, and us. Not one of us is without the need for forgiveness. All of us owe our Lord and Savior an un-payable debt for his loving sacrifice for us, for his redeeming love which leads to salvation.

Today's lesson reminds us of what we are called to do, for when we can begin to view all of humanity as fully made in God's image, as fully embodying Christ, as fully endowed with the Spirit, then we are taking the steps towards living into the truth of the identity of our Savior Jesus Christ. Who is Jesus of Nazareth? The Promised One who can open our eyes and break open our hearts to the ways of true discipleship. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light. Amen.