September 19, 2019

Scripture

Luke 7:36-50

A certain Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him,
and he entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.
Now there was a sinful woman in the city
who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee.
Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment,
she stood behind him at his feet weeping
and began to bathe his feet with her tears.
Then she wiped them with her hair,
kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment.
When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself,
"If this man were a prophet,
he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him,
that she is a sinner."
Jesus said to him in reply,
"Tell me, teacher," he said.
"Two people were in debt to a certain creditor;
one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty.
Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both.
Which of them will love him more?"
Simon said in reply,
"The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven."
He said to him, "You have judged rightly."
Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon,
"Do you see this woman?
When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet,
but she has bathed them with her tears
and wiped them with her hair.
You did not give me a kiss,
but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered.  
You did not anoint my head with oil,  
but she anointed my feet with ointment.  
So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven;  
 hence, she has shown great love.  
But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little."

He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."  
The others at table said to themselves,  
"Who is this who even forgives sins?"

But he said to the woman,  
"Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

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**Our Scripture Reflection**

The setting for this powerful story is a formal banquet where the guests of honor would recline gracefully on couches -- an environment designed specifically for important figures to offer lectures and insights on moral and theological issues. The evident strain in the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees did not prevent a Pharisee, Simon, from inviting Jesus to be his special guest at this public meal. But this proper, refined atmosphere is interrupted by the surprising entrance of a wholly inappropriate figure -- a woman "who was a sinner". Her behavior is as unexpected and outlandish as is her presence. Although she herself does not speak throughout this entire pericope, her actions and gestures communicate volumes. She is obviously an uninvited guest, although the generally public nature of such formal banquets allowed for the presence of others than the invited diners. Luke identifies her as one "who was a sinner" -- a description which, coupled with her unescorted arrival and formally immodest behavior, certainly suggests she was a prostitute.

She is not financially destitute. She brings with her a costly "alabaster jar of ointment." Her behavior suggests she has faced some emotional destitution, however, for at the sight of Jesus she begins to weep -- bathing his feet, in fact, with her tears. She follows this emotional display by then drying Jesus' feet with her hair, while continuing to apply tears and now the ointment in liberal quantities.

By simply touching Jesus, this woman has ritually defiled him whether or not she was a prostitute. She is present where she ought not be. She has uncovered her hair in public. She has acted on her own outside any family connections -- all shameful, impure, scandalous behaviors for a first-century Jewish woman. Jesus' host responds with a typical party-line judgment upon both this woman and Jesus himself. By allowing the woman to touch him or by failing to recognize the woman's sinfulness, Simon feels Jesus has abrogated any prophetic claims he might have had.

Yet even though the woman has violated serious religious laws, she, nonetheless, has won favor with Jesus. Why? Because she is humble. She wants to be forgiven and reunited with God and she turns to the One who can do that. Interesting, she leaves the dinner that night justified, but the arrogant, self-righteous host, Simon, does not.

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**Food for your Journey**

Every Friday, an old man walked from his house in the early evening down to the ocean, carrying a bucket of shrimp. And as the sun September 19, 2019

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Food for your Journey

Every Friday, an old man walked from his house in the early evening down to the ocean, carrying a bucket of shrimp. And as the sun started its descent and the evening waves gently lapped the shore, he walked to the end of the pier and reached in his bucket of shrimp and began to feed the birds who were already there waiting for him. Slowly, intentionally, he distributed the contents of his bucket, as he did every Friday evening, with the sun slipping down over the horizon.

What was he doing there? He was saying thank you.

His name was Captain Eddie Rickenbacker. Years before, in October, 1942, President Roosevelt dispatched Captain Rickenbacker with a special message to General MacArthur who was beginning to plan American strategy in the Pacific war. But the B-17 became lost, ran out of fuel and went down. The crew of eight made it into lifeboats and then began a harrowing, desperate fight to survive the sun, sharks, waves, and most of all, hunger.

When it seemed that the end had come and there was no hope, when they had prayed all they could pray, Captain Rickenbaker, in the raft, was asleep with his cap over his eyes. He felt something. A bird had lit on his head. He knew if he could catch it, they would survive. He did. And they ate it. They used its entrails for bait. They survived.

And so the old captain, now hunched over, but still proud, every Friday of his life, took his bucket of shrimp and fed the birds and said, "Thank you."

Frank Harrington, Senior Minister at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, first told this story and ended it with these words: "What was that sea gull doing there hundreds of miles from land anyway?"

He didn't try to answer his own question. He left it dangling. -- As retold by John M. Buchanan, "On Prayer," Chicago, Illinois, 24 xi 91.

A Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, There have been so many times when I have hurt Your Precious Heart by going my own way and doing my own thing as though I am in control of my own destiny. When I do, I feel
Dear Jesus, There have been so many times when I have hurt Your Precious Heart by going my own way and doing my own thing as though I am in control of my own destiny. When I do, I feel terrible. I feel ashamed and broken. Please give me the Grace that I need to avoid temptation and sin because they offend You and cause me to lose my way. May I strive even harder with Your help to live as You want me to live. Amen