

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *The woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee*

SERIES: *Jesus and Women*

SCRIPTURES: *Luke 7:36-50*

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**Credit to Ken Bailey & John Ortberg for their insights on this story.*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you here in this room and many gathered on-line, tuning in to the live stream or Facebook.

Heard a story about a man who wandered into a small antique shop in San Francisco one day (**PIC OF ANTIQUES**). The store was cluttered with knickknacks and junk, but on the floor he spotted what looked like an ancient Chinese vase. He picked it up and discovered that it was a priceless relic from the Ming dynasty worth a fortune. And it looked like the owner had no idea how valuable it was because the vase was sitting on the floor, filled with milk, with a cat drinking from it.

All of a sudden the man realized that he had the opportunity to make the deal of a lifetime. So he went up to the owner and said, *"That's a beautiful cat you have there. I'd love to have her. How much would you sell her for?"*

The owner said, *"Oh no, that cat's not for sale. She keeps the place free from mice."* The man said, *"Oh, but I really love to have that cat. Would you take a hundred dollars for her?"*

The owner laughed and said, *"She's really not worth a hundred dollars, but if you want her that badly, she's yours."* So he gave the owner a hundred bucks.

But then he added, *"I'm also going to need something to feed her from as well. What if I throw in another ten bucks for that saucer she's drinking from?"*

The owner said, *"Oh, I could never do that. That saucer is actually an ancient Chinese vase from the Ming dynasty. It's my prized possession and worth a fortune. Funny thing, though, ever since I've put it on the floor, I've sold seventeen cats!"*

It takes a trained eye to notice value in something that others often neglect or overlook.

One of the great markers of maturity as a follower of Jesus is a unique ability to assign value and worth to those whom the world often excludes or overlooks or rejects. This ability to assign value is something the writers of Scripture often call “honoring one another.”

Paul wrote in a letter...⁹ **Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.** ¹⁰ **Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.**

In the Kingdom of Jesus, people are the prized possession worth a fortune. People are important, more important than anything else in life. And one of the primary task of Jesus’ people is to assign value and worth...to honor people. That’s what today encounter with Jesus is all about.

We are in the third week of a series called Jesus and women (**SERIES GRAPHIC**).

One of the more extraordinary features of the stories about Jesus life, is the way in which Jesus Kingdom was breaking down all kinds of social, economic, cultural even religious barriers. Jesus opened the door for the marginalized in his world to participate in the life of his Kingdom.

And one of the groups that was invited to participate in the Jesus community, we might say honored, in a way they had never been before was women. And so were just taking a few weeks to tell the stories of these remarkable encounters.

Two weeks ago, we sat at the feet of Jesus, with Mary. Last week, we witnessed the perseverance and love of a gentile mother for her sick child. This morning we make our way to the house of Simon the Pharisee for our next Jesus encounter. Luke tells this story in the seventh chapter of his book...**Luke 7.**

So let's take a look at

I. Jesus and the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee.

The first thing we need to notice is...

A. The Dis-honoring Host

³⁶ When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

Now this seems like a fairly harmless scene, but it turns out there are some obvious **rules of etiquette** missing from the story.

Every society has certain rules of etiquette pertaining to hospitality, having guests in your home.

Suppose you are invited to someone's home for a meal, but you are still hungry after the main course has been served. What would be an appropriate response?

a. Request a second helping.

b. Ask in a condescending tone, "Is that all there is?"

- c. Yell, “Look out the window!” and take food from your neighbors plate while they are distracted.**
- d. Secretly call Domino’s pizza and act surprised when the delivery go shows up at the house.**

The point is, just as there are rules of etiquette related to hospitality in our world today, so also in Jesus’ day there were certain rules of etiquette.

What may not stand out to us, but certainly would to Middle Easterner’s is that many of the traditional courtesies seem to have been ignored by Simon the Pharisee when Jesus enters his home.

Three customs in particular...

1. A Kiss

Customary greeting for a guest at the time was a kiss.

The kiss could take different forms depending on the parties involved...usually on the cheek or the hand.

A common greeting between rabbi & disciples was the disciple kissing the rabbi’s hand, it was a sign of respect.

Which is why the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Judas we are told kisses Jesus would have been so striking...the kiss which was supposed to be a symbol of etiquette and honor was turned by Judas into an act of mockery and betrayal.

2. Clean feet

The washing of feet of was also customary before a meal.

If the guest was an important person, the host may offer to wash the guest's feet. If not, he might have a servant do it. If the host was being lazy, he may just offer water and tell the guest to do it on their own, but that would be similar in our world to inviting folks for dinner and then asking them to wash their own dishes before they leave.

But clean feet was a sign of respect or honor to your guests.

And then third, though not always required, sometimes a host would offer a guest

3. Olive Oil

...to wash the feet and hands or even the head.

My understanding is that the olive oil was a bit like deodorant in the ancient world. Traveling in a hot, dusty environment without shoes or air conditioned vehicles...led to something called "strong body odor." You don't have to be a Middle Easterner or Greek scholar to understand that. And so the olive oil was to help eliminate that odor.

The Talmud says, **"The absence of oil is a bar to the saying of grace...Just as a dirty person is unfit for the Temple service, so dirty hands unfit one for saying grace."** (Bailey)

In other words, before you sit down and pray for your meal...wash your hands.

To omit these hospitable greetings, shows a lack of care and concern for guests. Almost as if Simon is intentionally trying to dis-honor Jesus.

Second, let's now look at the...

B. The Hospitable Sinner.

(which sounds very strange to say...)

³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume.

Meals of this sort, where public figures were gathering, were often open to the public. Folks would be allowed to gather around the outer edges of the room and listen in on the conversation between Jesus and Simon.

Though we aren't given specific details about this woman's sin, traditionally, many scholars suggest she is a prostitute, she sells her body for money...which is why she is known around town as a sinful woman.

Now, why did she come to the meal? It appears that the assumption in the story, is that the woman had heard Jesus proclaiming this incredible message that "*God loves sinners*". That's not something she's heard Rabbi's teaching before. For the first time in her life, the thought occurs to her...*God loves me. It is not too late even for me.* She determines she must meet this Jesus.

She goes to the dinner and of course what was obvious to everyone that day was also obvious to her...she notices how Jesus has been dishonored by his hosts.

"She watches as the one who has given her new life is ignored and insulted. No one comes to his side; no one stands up for him." (Ortberg 208)

What can I do for this man who has given my life hope once again?

The thought begins to formulate...she could be the one to give Jesus the welcome he deserves. She moves from the outer edges of the room toward Jesus...the room gets quiet...everyone watches in quiet anticipation. What is she doing?

38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

The sinful woman honors Jesus. She assigns value and worth to Jesus. She is the only one in the room, with eyes to notice the significance of the rabbi seated at that table.

Notice all three elements of proper hospitable etiquette are noted. She greets Jesus with a kiss, but on his feet. She then cleans his feet, using the tears falling from her face as water. She dries them with her hair and though she has no olive oil, she has brought expensive perfume instead. It is a remarkable scene.

Of course in so doing, she is breaking all kinds of social and religious rules. This woman is not supposed to touch Jesus. Simon is disgusted...

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "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."

For Simon this world can be divided into two groups: rule-breakers and rule-followers. There are **613 rules** in the Jewish Law. The purpose of life, the aim in life is to follow the rules. Therefore, a righteous person is one who follows all of those rules and a sinner is someone who doesn't.

And righteous rule-followers should stay away from rule-breaking sinners so they don't get contaminated by them.

And the role of the righteous is to keep shouting out the rules so that eventually sinners will realize their sinful ways and want to choose to become like the rule-following saints.

Now do you see a problem with Simon's way of thinking? The problem is that those 613 laws are guided by two primary concepts: **Loving God and loving others**. The purpose behind **the rules** was to teach people how to love.

Jesus said, the greatest commandment in his Kingdom is to love, to love God and to **love others**. The greatest value is to learn to see people the way God sees them. To assign value and worth to other human beings, even those that world often excludes.

Simon has learned to follow all of the rules, but he doesn't know how to honor and value people. He thought following God was mostly about keeping all the rules and in the process he missed the most important rule...love. He's missed the whole point of the 613 laws.

This often happens when our (**RULES ABOVE LOVING OTHERS**) rules become more important than people.

It's possible to follow all of the rules and not be a loving person.

Before we get too hard on Simon. I just think it's worth pointing out that we, church people, tend to do the same thing. We are often more concerned about the rules being followed than we are about loving the people who have broken those rules.

We have singled out certain groups of people as rule-breakers...

People who don't dress quite right...

People who don't talk quite right...

People who don't look quite right.

People who choose life-styles we don't agree with...

If they walked into our building they would feel really uncomfortable. We would feel really uncomfortable. We wouldn't know how to begin an interaction with a "sinner", a prostitute, drug-dealer...

We separate ourselves or even marginalize, reject, ridicule them.

What a shame when we, the people of God, get stuck on the rules and fail to live up to the most important commandment...loving others.

And sadly the church often seems to think that if we keep shouting out our rules of righteous living loud enough that will convince people to change their life-styles and they'll want to live the way we do.

And it's why we must always turn and look back at Jesus. He's the master teacher, he shows us how we are to live. Let's see how Jesus model's...

II. Honoring Others

So notice how Jesus responds...

Jesus said to Simon, (Luke 7:44-47) **"Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven..."**

48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Jesus honors the sinful woman. He assigns her value she could not have dreamed she deserved. Two things I want to point out about the way in which Jesus honors the sinful woman.

A. Jesus honors her by suffering with her.

Jesus enters the humiliation and rejection with her.

See when the woman stepped forward, Simon and the other guests at this meal would have been horrified, disgusted by the sinful woman. All Jesus had to do was what any other good rabbi would do. *“Woman, don’t touch me. Go to the Temple and seek forgiveness there if you are truly sorry, but what you are doing here and now is embarrassing me and degrading.”* (Bailey)

But instead, Jesus welcomes her actions.

And by so doing, the disgust and horror, that was directed at the sinful woman is now shifted onto Jesus. The guests are now disgusted with Jesus. He takes her humiliation and rejection on himself. **Jesus is willing to get hurt in order to honor this unknown, immoral woman.** (Bailey).

A number of years ago someone sent me a neat story that just illustrated this concept for me...maybe you have heard bits of this story before. It was about a young man...*in his early twenties. Had wild hair, and he wore a T-shirt with holes in it, blue jeans, and no shoes.*

Lived across the street from a church, with a very well-dressed, very conservative congregation. You know good righteous rule-followers.

One Sunday, the young man decided to go to the church. He walked in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair. The service had already started and he started down the aisle looking for a seat.

The church was completely packed and he couldn't find a seat anywhere. By then, people were noticing him and beginning to look a bit uncomfortable, but no one said anything.

He got closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realized there were no seats, he just squatted down right on the carpet.

By then the people were really uptight, and the tension in the air was thick.

About that time, the minister realized that from way at the back of the church, a deacon was slowly making his way forward. You know you're in trouble when the church deacons are after you.

The deacon was in his eighties and he had silver-gray hair, and a three-piece suit. A Godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly.

He walked with a cane. As he started walking toward the young man, everyone was saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he was about to do.

How could you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some hippie college kid sitting on the floor in church?

It took a long time for the old man to reach the boy. The church was utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes were focused on him.

You couldn't even hear anyone breathing. The minister couldn't even preach the sermon until the deacon did what he had to do.

But as he reached the place where the boy was sitting, the elderly man dropped his cane on the floor. And with great difficulty, the old man lowered himself and sat down next to young man and worshiped with him so he wouldn't be alone.

I don't know how you often look at people you think of as rule-breakers, but Jesus says that in his Kingdom we honor such folks, by choosing to suffer with

them...personally, economically, reputation, even getting down on the floor to sit beside them if that's what it takes.

Now, why does Jesus do this? Because Jesus knows that what really changes hearts is not rules but costly love.

2. Costly love (honoring others) is what changes lives, not rules.

Notice Jesus does not quote the law to her about her sin, at least not first, instead he honors her with remarkable love.

You can picture the scene. The woman broken, at Jesus feet, wondering what Jesus is thinking. She knows she shouldn't be touching him, she's just holding out hope that Jesus is who she thought he was.

She's just hoping that this Jesus meant all those things he said about God's unconditional love for sinners like her.

I can only imagine that at some point she pauses, in a moment of desperate courage, she looks up at Jesus. What will he say, how will he look at her? For years the only eyes she has ever seen looking back at her were the eyes of lust and condemnation and rejection.

But now in this moment as she looks into Jesus eyes, she sees not judgement or ridicule or rejection for her past but instead she sees remarkable love. She sees Jesus defending her, affirming her and in the process carving out space for her in the community of his followers. She has become Jesus prized possession. And that kind of honor, will change her life. She will never be the same again.

Jesus costly love to her will inevitably become a life-changing force in her life.

(Ortberg)

It's not that the rules don't matter, that's not what I'm saying at all. Living by Jesus rules is always the best way to live life. It's just that if you want to have a conversation with someone about the rules...it's better to start with costly love first...I suspect if we start there, then some folks would be a little more willing to consider some of the rules.

This woman had come to understand at the deepest level something that even the expert in the Law was completely missing, something that rules can't teach, she understood God's deep love for her and she was overwhelmed.

Folks when Jesus looks at our world, he sees a world full of people and to Him people are the most important. And I just believe if he were in our world today, he would probably say church, I need a group of people willing to honor broken sinners...to value with the costly love...the hurting, the marginalized, the unwelcome.

That if we want to see lives changed for the kingdom it won't be by shouting our rules louder and trying to make people follow them. Instead it will be remarkable love and honor that will encourage them to give this whole Jesus-life a chance.

I think that's what Jesus did that day with this woman. He was willing to sit on the floor with her and the honor he gave her would forever change her life.

Jesus does this for crooked tax collectors, unfaithful friends, prodigal sons, a thief on a cross...and he does it for you and me. On that cross, he took our humiliation and rejection upon himself in costly love...because he knew that's what would change our lives.