Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“I have something to say to you” (Luke 7:40).

1 Tim 4:12-16; Luke 7:36-50

Luke is called the "Gospel of Women" for its portrayal of Jesus’ regard for women in a culture that was dismissive and male dominant. The author is also noteworthy as a sensitive storyteller with literary skill and empathy. Today’s account of the woman who crashes the party at the house of the Pharisee to show her gratitude to Jesus is a good example. The account is rich in detail and charged with tensions that nuance the depictions of Jesus, his host and the other Pharisees at the private banquet.

The invitation to dine, but the absence of the prescribed kiss, foot bathing and anointing for Jesus, suggests that the dinner is a hostile set-up to interrogate Jesus. His legal and moral laxity by dining with sinners and his generous views about God’s mercy challenged the righteous Pharisees. The evening’s agenda was to debate Jesus’ orthodoxy. The arrival of the woman identified as a public sinner turns the event into a dramatic, teachable moment.

Luke notes the fact that the woman was familiar to Simon and that she knows where he lives and has access to the house. She approaches Jesus, kneels at his feet extending from the couch where he reclines at table. She begins to weep, lets down her hair to wipe the tears falling on his feet, lavishing precious ointment on them. We are left to imagine the reactions of the guests to this extravagance of love shown to Jesus, who now turns his attention to the host: *See this unconditional love, Simon, this response to God’s mercy, a generosity of heart you failed to show me as*

your guest. A simple greeting kiss, water to wash my feet, a drop of oil on my head. Your hardness of heart is exposed by this woman, who pours out her heart in gratitude for God's forgiveness.

A parable conparing two debtors highlights the message and gives Simon the chance to show he understands. The erotically charged moment passes and turns to shame as the guests disperse, pondering the meanness of spirit that brought them to the meal and the hardness of heart harboring their own sinfulness. Each one secretly longs for the kind of love he has just seen lavished on Jesus. Yet, even after this electrifying lesson, these Pharisees regroup to find fault with Jesus for thinking he can forgive sins. They will get him next time.

We are drawn into this story, its perfumed details and complex emotions, and we are left to ponder our own reluctance to be merciful but our desire to be loved. Jesus exists in the perfect balance that purity of heart creates in all his relationships. Our sins are exposed to judgment but also to his forgiveness. He looks at us with love and says, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you."

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