

✠ Luke 7:36-8:3 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Poor Simon. He didn't mean any harm. In fact, he meant to be gracious and giving. He meant to be hospitable. He invited Jesus, even if he did not agree with Jesus, this Rabbi, into his house to eat his food and drink his wine. He shared his table and his family with this Man. No doubt he served his best meat and pulled out the best wine from his wine cellar. He spared no expense to impress this Man who did not consider the positions and status of men something to be respected.

And for all his trouble what does he get? A rebuke. An accusing finger thrust in his face, accusing him of not loving God. He thought he was doing well. He thought he knew how to react to sinners and prostitutes; avoiding them and their filth to keep himself clean and pure. His thought, "If this man were a prophet he would know what sort of woman this is," was not, in his mind, heresy or even disrespect to the Teacher. He merely knew the Law and was reacting accordingly. Association with the unclean makes one unclean and no one who is of God should let him or herself become defiled.

But indeed Simon was poor. He was poor in understanding. He was poor in righteousness because he had not placed his faith in this Man that sat before him eating his food and drinking his wine. Simon did not think that the righteous shall live by faith, but rather that the righteous shall live by the works of the Law; obeying the commandments and laws handed down from Moses and tradition.

Poor Simon. He was clueless. Heralded as a teacher of his people, a Pharisee, the most prestigious rank among those who followed the Law of Moses, he was still worse than this woman who was a manifest sinner. He was far above her in the eyes of the world, but did not even come up to the soles of her feet in the eyes of this Man, Jesus.

Thank God we are not like Simon. Thank God we recognize Jesus for who He really is, the One who is able to forgive sins and grant peace. Thank God we do not try to achieve righteousness by the works of the Law or by our personal piety and holiness. Thank God we are not like this Pharisee who is obviously a sinner in need of the accusing finger to bring him to repentance.

Yes indeed, thank God we are not like Simon, but are rather more like the woman. Behold the magnificent display of devotion and true piety. She wept bitterly, spilling her tears of repentance on the Master's feet, drying them with the garland about her head. She poured ointment over His feet, confessing His beauty and purity. She did not even consider His feet too dirty or ugly to be adorned with her lips as she gave to Jesus her most intimate expression of gratitude and love by kissing His feet.

Oh, yes, thank God we are more like the woman. Perhaps it is true that we do not shed tears over our sins, but we're nonetheless awfully sorry for them, whatever they might be. It is true that we do not anoint the Master with the ointment of *total* loyalty and devotion, but we at least come to church most Sundays. It is true that we think too highly of ourselves to get

down on all fours and kiss the feet of the Master, and it is true that we think or at least behave as if our opinions and judgments are just as valid as His and those He sends. Even better than His since we know our time and circumstances, our culture and attitudes better than He does.

But at least we are not like Simon. Yes thank God we are not like Simon. It is true that we look down upon this woman of the city with contempt, after all she is a 'woman of the city' a prostitute. But we're glad for her because we think, "If Jesus can forgive her, surely He can forgive me for I am not as bad as all that." And even while contemptuous, we think our eyes are soft with compassion thinking, "Poor woman, she's had it so hard. I don't need to do what she's done to Jesus, but it's good that she is. It's a good thing that Jesus knows how much she loves Him for she is very sinful."

So sinful, in fact, that she needs to do what she's done. She needs to weep and cry, lament and wail. She needs to make a big show of worshiping Jesus for she has sinned greatly. She needs to make recompense and demonstrate her sorrow and regret for her many and manifest gross sins. She needs to pay back fourfold for what she has done – defiling the marriage bed and spreading disease and filth. She needs to appease the anger of God for she deserves to die for her sins!

No, thank God I am not like the woman; she is a sinner. And look at how she displays herself. She carries on and makes a scene. It's embarrassing! Woman, control yourself. Don't come to Jesus with loud cries and tears of repentance and confession. Jesus wants to see people who look pretty and smell nice. Don't spill that ointment of total loyalty and devotion on Jesus' feet. Don't you know He would rather you put that money in the offering plate? Or don't you know that the Gospel can't be preached without our money? And don't, for the love of everything holy, kiss Him! How uncouth! It is unthinkable that our mouths and hands touch the Lord of Glory! No matter how much He has done for us.

Look at how Simon treats Him. He dignifies Him with food and drink, good conversation and entertainment, hospitality and manners. You! You come and kneel before Him as one who is wicked and perverse! Jesus wants us to come to Him pure and holy, not as sinners. You should be more like Simon. At least he behaves as expected, with dignity and honor, and will attract more backsides to fill the pews.

Repent, for you are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "I have born your sins on my back and suffered for your iniquity. I have poured my healing waters over your head and made my dwelling with you. I have sustained you by feeding you not with food that rots and wine that spoils, but with my flesh that makes you holy and my blood that gives you life. I have delivered into your hands the riches of my glory and have given you my righteousness. I have loved you wholly, spilling my life's blood for you, and you have returned that love with spite and hatred.

"Instead of loving me by confessing your sins and seeking my kingdom, you despise my word by doing what is evil in my sight by trying to hide your sins and accuse others of what you yourself are guilty of. How often, instead of looking to me for salvation, coming to where I have invited you, my holy Table, you point out how wicked and evil others are; hoping that by comparison you will gain access to my Father's house? How often instead of looking to me for your salvation, you look to your faith as a good work you have done? Saying, 'In the end, my faith will save me.' While all the while ignoring the object of your faith.

“Rather than cry and shed tears of contrition and pour the ointment of repentance, you prostitute yourself out to gods who cannot love and gods who cannot save you; the gods of money, the gods of church attendance, the gods of self-righteous opinions and ideas, the gods of tradition and of false peace among men, and perhaps the worst of all, the god of comfort and self-respect.

“Yet I have cancelled your debt. Though you cannot, I have appeased the wrath of God for you. I have put away your sin, your idolatry and hatred, your covetousness and self-righteousness; you shall not die. I have redeemed you from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for you. And though you are weak, and grow tired of hearing my words, I will never tire of taking you under my wings and speaking to you the words of eternal life and salvation: your sins are forgiven, go in peace.”

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠