

WHINING AND DINING Luke 7. 36 to 8 – 3

The heart of this Gospel story is Jesus' conversation with Simon the Pharisee. Simon had invited Jesus into his home. The fact that Jesus accepted is telling. His relationship with some of the Pharisees was not as adversarial as is sometimes thought. Jesus was interested in speaking not only to outcasts but also to those in positions of authority.

Simon welcomes Jesus with a barbed comment. It's a bit like when we say with undue emphasis, 'Hello stranger.' Sometimes it is a judgement on our absence from others' lives rather than their pleasure at seeing us. That's why I've titled this reflection 'Whining or wingeing and Dining'. Simon watches as a known town trollop comes uninvited into his house to see who? Not him – the owner – but Jesus the travelling teacher. Word has got around that they and others are having a meal together today. She's got fortitude this lady as she comes in to the main room carrying an alabaster container. Alabaster was a common stone resembling white marble and it was used in the decoration of Solomon's temple. Ointment, oils and perfumes used to be placed inside and these were completely contained until it was time for their use. What's going on? She begins to cry quietly and her tears flow onto Jesus' feet. He is reclining at the meal table. It is obvious to her that his sandalled feet have not been washed by the host. Perhaps she is ashamed that these common courtesies have not been offered. Then she opens her box and begins to massage Jesus' feet with the expensive oil. It was expected of all wives that they were to attend to their husband's feet, not the servants. The social taboos are heaping up in this story.

Simon can't take any more and his head is spinning. 'If this man, Jesus, is the prophet I think he is, he'd know what sort of woman is falling all over him.' Jesus is aware of Simon's doubt, and much more; he knows Simon's very heart.

'Simon, I've something to say to you.'

'OK, what is it?'

Jesus tells him a little story as the meal sits uneaten. (I'd have told him where to go.)

'Two men were in debt to a banker. One owed \$500,00, the other \$50,000. Neither could pay so the banker cancelled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful?'

Simon answered, 'I suppose the one who was forgiven the most.'

'Got it in one,' said Jesus.

He turned to the woman, but still speaking to Simon went on, 'I came to your home, you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on them and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she has not stopped kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with oil. I mean, you could have anointed my head with oil, knowing what you know, but you did nothing. You've missed out on a huge blessing. Her sins are all forgiven for she has shown just how much she loves me. You see, Simon, those who only experience a little forgiveness can only experience a tiny bit of love.'

Then Jesus looked at this dear lady and said, 'Your sins are completely forgiven.'

The criticisms continue – 'when will we ever learn?' The other guests, talking behind Jesus' back whisper, 'Who does he think he is! Now he's forgiving sins. What next!' Jesus is unperturbed by these murmurs as he smiles at the lady as he says, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'

God, who is our supreme Forgiver, has entrusted us with the capacity to forgive. We, like the dinner guests, make our choices. 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive...' If we only knew that the forgiveness of our own sins depended on our capacity to forgive others, we'd probably be much more given to rooting out the hidden spirit of unforgiveness in our lives – many left over from the past. We fail to do this at our peril.

The parable Jesus told is aimed not at the woman, but at Simon. She is the example of the 'righteous one' in this passage, the one who loves much. Her generous acts of hospitality and love are signs that she has been forgiven much. She is not forgiven because of her acts but she acts with much love because much has been forgiven.

While Simon whined, she dined.

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