

The sinful woman

Luke 7:36-8:3

How Christian are you?

- Premier Christianity Magazine
- Kamala Harris, Democratic VP candidate – politics vs faith
- interesting question and a wrong-headed one; not a sliding scale

Looking to the scriptures

- Paul knew that there is no partiality with God (Rom 2:11)
- Paul knew that there is no longer Greek or Jew, slave or free just one in Christ (Gal 3:28)
- Jesus corrected the disciples when they asked “what are the works of God?” ie what must we do to be right with him
- “The works of God are to believe in the one the Father sent” (John 6:29) – **the bar is low**
- Simon Ponsonby NW 2015 – the verities of our faith...the minimum

Sin exists and is bad

Jesus, son of God, died on the cross

Jesus was resurrected

Jesus is coming again to judge and make new – that’s enough

To say Lord, Lord - our faith is a relationship!

Like any relationship it exists whether we tend to it a lot or a little.

Many people have those friendships that last forever even if you don’t speak that often and when you do its like it was yesterday – well with God its many, many times more so.

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More than that, it’s a **covenant** – a solemn promise

One party to that arrangement – God – is “compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Ex 34:6-7)

So if you are in that place that you find it difficult to find time for God, energy to pray, time to pick up your Bible, he’s still that friend.

Our reading today from Luke is an illustration of this idea of relationship and how we **demonstrate our commitment.**

We enter the scene where Jesus has been preaching in the synagogues.

Just imagine a visiting preacher – we might invite them back for Sunday lunch or over to stay offering Saturday dinner. Hopefully with grace and joy! Not much about the Pharisee’s demeanor suggests that he did this willingly.

He questions his guests’ actions and motives. The usual niceties of hospitality are not offered – washing dusty feet, soothing from the heat of the day with oil, a loving greeting.

The pharisee, called Simon, has invited Jesus into his home as a teacher and potential prophet. He is critical - surely, he would know what was going on – because God would tell him!

“If this man were a prophet he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – she is a sinner”

If this were a cartoon it would be a thought bubble. If a drama, a voice over.

He is privately criticizing and judging his guest, whom he has largely insulted by his lack lustre welcome.

Jesus has never been to this village before, he is an outsider. He has no reason to know who the woman is. We are told that she lives a sinful life. We are not told her sin and it is not helpful to speculate. It is, however, a lifestyle that is known to others and by that she has been categorized and branded.

She has heard of Jesus. Maybe she was in the synagogue and heard him teach. She seeks him out and comes to the meal.

It should not come as a surprise that had Jesus not been there she would have most likely been rejected by the Pharisee whose house it was. But in the presence of the special guest, Jesus, she is allowed to stay.

They are at table, which was a low table, surrounded by cushions on the floor. The diners were reclined. Feet only just below the head as they lean on one elbow.

This is no falling at Jesus’ feet. This is a tender show of love and hospitality at the same floor level that you find Jesus himself.

She stands behind him and weeps.

Why did she cry?

Was it her own pain? Or the gratitude to the teacher who brings hope and a gospel of a kingdom of forgiveness and God’s love for all who come to him.

Whatever it is, she puts it into action. Not by some grand gesture or festival or showy banquet to be admired by the good and great.

She washes his feet with her tears – a dramatic act of service.

She puts expensive perfume on them, a show of affection.

She kisses his feet – a sign of love.

She makes him welcome in the most intimate way possible.

Feet are not generally pretty.

When a curate I led a school assembly on the John 13 passage on the washing of the feet at the last supper. I asked the headteacher to join me. The plan was that we would just pretend. It came to it. He took his shoes and socks off (much to the astonishment of the children). He is 6ft 7 so these feet were substantial. He was sitting and I knelt down to the bowl of water. I looked up andI swear he nodded.

I cupped a handful of water and poured it over his feet. 300 under 11’s gasped all at the same time!

And the headteacher ?– couldn't look me in the eye for over a month!

What we see this woman do is incredibly intimate.

A small, even insignificant gesture but it comes from a heart overflowing with gratitude and love.

Turning, finally, to Jesus in the story.

He is pleased to be invited (Jesus rarely turned down a meal and would even invite himself!)

He has a word of knowledge not only about the woman but also about what the Pharisee, Simon is thinking.

He challenges him – “I have something to tell you”

He then tells a story, a parable. Two debts forgiven. Who loves more? “The one with the bigger debt”

If Simon does not see himself as the small debtor in the story, Jesus rams home his point by what follows:

You DID NOT – three times

She GAVE OF HERSELF – tears, hair, perfume, kisses – three times

You do not consider her worthy.

She has much to forgive

She has shown much love

I forgive her and save her – because of her faith.

To Simon faith was

Keep the laws

Keep your reputation

Keep separate from others ,separate from sinners (that is what Pharisee means – be separate)

To the woman faith was an intimate expression of love; a relationship bonded by simple human reaction.

She knew. Mary, Joanna and Susanna knew this too.

The works of God are to believe in the one the Father sent.

There are times when this is all we have. All we can hold onto.

This may be that time for you. Just surviving. Just coping. Hunkering down.

If you had a relationship with Jesus before, you still do.

When you talk again it will like it was just yesterday.

Small gestures are enough.

You need to know that Jesus will not say “well you wouldn't know this because you haven't been around”; the death of any absent friendship!

²⁰ *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Rev 3:20)*

He is standing waiting for you to open the door and he will eat with you.

There is a simple prayer that is designed for those times when we do not have words – Eastern Orthodox prayer - the Jesus prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God

Have mercy on me (Mark 10)

A sinner (Luke 18:3)

The woman knew who she was. She also knew that she had a relationship and she had to express her feelings in the simplest way possible – a kiss, a tear, offering herself.

When you struggle and all the usual things – prayer time, services, opening your bible or anything else seems too much.

Follow the advice of Teresa of Avila, posted by Pete Grieg today on social media:

“The most important thing about prayer is not to think much but to love much”. Open your day with “Jesus – I love you” and maybe say this...

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God

Have mercy on me (Mark 10)

A sinner (Luke 18:3) Amen.

Let's pray....

Using song words as poetry in absence of singing in church; very powerful.

Today finish with words of this song.

YOU NEVER LET GO – MATT REDMAN

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

Your perfect love is casting out fear

And even when I'm caught in the middle of the storms of this life

I won't turn back

I know You are near

And I will fear no evil

For my God is with me

And if my God is with me

Whom then shall I fear?

Whom then shall I fear?

Oh no, You never let go

Through the calm and through the storm

Oh no, You never let go

In every high and every low

Oh no, You never let go
Lord, You never let go of me

And I can see a light that is coming for the heart that holds on
A glorious light beyond all compare
And there will be an end to these troubles
But until that day comes
We'll live to know You here on the earth

And I will fear no evil
For my God is with me
And if my God is with me
Whom then shall I fear?
Whom then shall I fear?

Oh no, You never let go
Through the calm and through the storm
Oh no, You never let go
In every high and every low
Oh no, You never let go
Lord, You never let go of me

Amen