



February 23 - Small Steps

Welcoming people into your home can be stressful. If it is someone you do not know well, it feels as though you are showing them your life. It gives a glimpse into your life. With others, it can feel totally natural but can still be stressful hoping to be a good host. There is one type of guest that really stresses me out. Play dates. The kids are fine. They run around and play. It is when the other parent either sticks around or lingers. Do you sit? Do you stand? Do you offer something to eat or drink? What do you talk about? There is this tight rope walk of getting to know one another while also trying to be a host.

I empathize with Simon in this story. He is being a careful host. He invites Jesus over, and Jesus SHOWS UP! He is so worried about doing something wrong that he forgets what it is to be a host. He wants to make a good impression. He has a desire to get to know Jesus. Yet, his careful approach leaves him observing at a distance as true hospitality is expressed by someone else.

That is what happens in this text. The woman becomes the host while the host is too nervous to respond. She washes Jesus' feet and anoints them. She sits with Jesus and gives her undivided attention. By the sounds of it, she is not invited. She walks in with a jar of ointment and stands behind Jesus and weeps at his feet. With those very tears and the contents of the jar, she gives Jesus all she has. She becomes the true host and an example to all in the house.

Simon seems somewhat frozen and stuck in this internal dialogue. If only Jesus knew that she was a sinner. Jesus interrupts Simon's thoughts and tells a parable about forgiveness and its response. Then, Jesus asks a second question, far more profound than the first, "Do you see this woman?" Jesus knows that Simon tends to look past those he views as beneath his rank and role. Jesus makes him look. Jesus asks him to see her, to notice her, to know her value.

The truth is that it is easy to lose sight of one's value, whether of others or of yourself. It is easy to start to believe the narratives that you are not enough. It is just as easy to gain an inflated sense of self and start to look down on others or look right past them. Jesus reminds us to truly see one another as beloved siblings. After all, what determines someone or something's value? Take a bottle of water for example, at the grocery store, it has a given price. The same water in a pop machine is going to cost more. At a restaurant even more. At an airport...well, you get the point. The value has to do with what others believe it to be.

Jesus sees this woman as profoundly valuable and asks Simon to see her in this way. God views all people that way. Not as a bulk pack of water in the grocery store. We are each found to be of great value, irreplaceable, and loved. Who are the people Jesus may ask you to see? Is it the immigrant or refugee struggling to stay safe and alive in the current political landscape? Is it the people living in a tent camp near the river, struggling to stay warm and safe? Is it a friend or family member who thinks differently about politics than you do?

This text is as much a call to mission as it is a reminder of forgiveness and hospitality. With all that is happening in the world today, we need each other. We need to support one another. We need to open our eyes to the pain in the world, and as we see it, face to face, we are called to respond. Sometimes that is direct care and action. Sometimes that is creating awareness and helping others to see the hurt around them. Sometimes it is the work of advocacy, speaking truth to power and guiding change.

Simon, the Pharisee, stood by and observed because he was unsure of what to do next. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and freeze when unsure how to respond. If you feel overwhelmed by what is before you, take a smaller first step. We know how to follow Christ. Do not let the current events in the world cause you to become overwhelmed and freeze. Take a smaller first step. Start with love. Amen.

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