

## Sermon Text for May 22, 2016

*by Brett Foote*

Luke 7: 36-50

### **“The Sinful Woman and The Sinful Simon”**

First of all, it is an incredible blessing to have been given another chance to preach... well either that or Bob just wanted a break.... I'm unsure.... Just kidding. But in all seriousness I am thankful. Thankful for a church community who supports me in tangible ways. SHOW PICTURES. Experiencing life within the ecumenical monastic community known as Taizé is and was life changing. It helped shape my view of God and my view of ministry, I felt very affirmed in my calling to ordination within the Presbyterian Church, and I felt renewed spiritually. Thank you for that. It was there that God placed this scripture on my heart. It was there that I saw this story play out... in a way. But we will get back to that in a bit. A little bit about the scripture we will be getting into.

We find a beautiful yet confusing story in the heart of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Luke. Let me break it down and give you some context before we illustrate this:

This story takes place shortly after Jesus names his Apostles and shares one of the most well known passages of scripture known as the beatitudes.

Simon who invited Jesus over for dinner, was a pharisee, that is a religious leader and not one of the Apostles.

This is a different story than the ones placed in the other Gospels of Jesus feet being anointed.

A woman touching Jesus, especially that kind of woman, is disgraceful.

This woman is thought to be an adulteress woman or a woman of ill-repute.

I felt very compelled to act this story out so you can see what exactly this may have looked like. I have invited Ethan and Tess to help me do that.

I'm playing Simon and the Narrator.... Ethan Jesus. Tess -The Woman

Our New Testament reading comes from the Gospel of Luke Chapter

Read through it.

Have Ethan and tess act it out live... not playfully.

I wanted to show you that because of how incredibly unbelievable it looks.

Now I want to tell you the story of a person named Bernie and how this kind of played out in real life. Before anyone gets riled up and thinks I'm about

to talk politics, I'm not going to. This is not Bernie Sanders i'm speaking of.

This Bernie, is actually named Bernadette, but she prefers to be called

Bernie. I met her on my first day at Taizé as I was cleaning toilets

alongside her and a dutch student studying theology. Conversations always start like this in Taizé: What's your name? Where are you from? What brought you to Taizé. Bernie told me her name, said she was from Romania after saying "you know Dracula? Yeah I'm from that country.", and shared that she was unsure what fully brought her there, and that she had been in Taizé for a few months. Explain Permanents... You can stay in Taize for as long as you would like if you commit to doing practical work around the community. She then asked about me... And then we started to talk about God. She said it wasn't because she was a christian that she came to Taizé. But instead she came for "community" and a powerful draw on her to seek something bigger. She said "I'm really just seeking something bigger that may be out there... You know?" I'm sure many of us know people like that....

My immediate thoughts when I hear these phrases from people/Young Adults are:

1. This person is lost spiritually. That's sad.
2. At the very least I'm glad they are seeking.

As the week went on I quickly realized there was a good mix of catholics, orthodox, protestants, agnostics, and even some atheists. Even in my small group I had an incredibly wide spread of views and backgrounds: Different religions, races, countries, languages, some with disabilities , and so much more. One thing in common for most: They were seeking. Seeking a God they had once known, seeking a God they know is there....but can't identify... seeking something bigger than themselves. All sinners. This was the case for my new friend Bernie although she wasn't in my small group.

Each week at Taizé they celebrate holy week from the triumphal entry to the crucifixion, and the eventual resurrection.

So on this Friday evening at Taizé like all of the Friday's we were recognizing Jesus death and crucifixion. To aid in the worship and prayers the brothers laid an Icon out and set in the middle of the floor during our evening prayer. The icon was this one. **SHOW ICON WITH PEOPLE AROUND IT.** The brothers eventually move to allow us, the young people to participate in the prayers with them. Now at the beginning of the week there were only about 200 of us give or take... less than that on the first day in fact...but by that Friday night we were over 800 young people

because a group of over 500 Italians had arrived. Anyone who knows people who are remotely Italian knows that when a group of friendly Italians are together there is a certain life and energy that is created. You could feel it. It was tangible. So I want you to imagine over 800 young people together sitting, kneeling, praying on the floor.... and this gesture to come to the feet of Jesus is metaphorically made. The brothers moved slowly and the next thing you know..... there are a few young people moving towards it. Who do I notice basically rushing the cross besides..... Bernie herself. There she was right at the feet of Jesus... weeping. Pause. I thought of the scripture that I had already heard that afternoon from Brother Stephen. The scripture about a woman who was assumedly far away from God bursting into tears on Jesus feet. The Luke scripture we read earlier. This.... is that. It was in that moment that I felt a bit like Simon the Pharisee. If Jesus was standing in the middle of the room, would he not compel me to rush him? Would he not compel me to come to my knees at his feet? Would he not compel me to tears? These were tough questions. Especially as I was sitting on the sidelines seeing Jesus, and sitting still.

Closer to the end of the scripture in Luke Jesus asks Simon the Pharisee a question:

‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii,\* and the other fifty. 42When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?’ 43Simon answered, ‘I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.’ And Jesus\* said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’

Jesus goes on to say that to whom little is forgiven loves little but to whom much is forgiven, loves much. He goes on to forgive this woman of her sins and rebuke Simon. It’s a surprising event.

But it’s not as surprising when we look into the context of what Jesus said in what I like to call The upside down kingdom. Read Luke 6:20-23

This is the kingdom where the Prostitute get’s and understands Jesus love and is raised up because she was reviled for his names sake and disenfranchised and the religious leader is left rebuked and challenged. It’s

because God loves us as we are.....sinners. That's the beauty of the Christian story.

In our Old Testament Scripture we see clearly the very words Jesus quotes earlier in the Gospel. Turn with me to Isaiah chapter 61:1-3. Let's read.

Isaiah says that they (The broken hearted, captives, prisoners, and the mourners), will become Oaks of righteousness. In the Hebrew this term "Oaks of Righteousness literally means "people distinguished for righteousness or justice." God is distinguishing this prostitute. By this act, God is distinguishing the disenfranchised, whoever they may be.

Brennan Manning author, hermit, and priest said : "God loves you as you are... Not as you should be. " Because the truth is that none of us in this room are as we should be. This is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity. When we get to heaven the one question that may be asked of us, will I imagine sound something like this "Did you believe I really loved you?" Jesus will ask us that. That fundamental question "did you believe I loved you and did you let it shape your entire life?" It's the question Jesus'

poses by his mere presence to the woman and Simon. It's the question that is answered clearly by this woman. She gets it.

My question to you: Do you get it?

God loves the Pharisee & the Prostitute. God loves you and God loves me.

It's that simple and it should shape our reaction to Jesus.

I'd like to end with one last piece from Manning because I believe it sums up what I've been saying: Salvation is by grace through faith (The kind of faith that moves one to weep at the Lord's feet), I believe that among the countless number of people standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands (see Revelation 7:9), I shall see the prostitute from the Kit-Kat Ranch in Carson City, Nevada, who tearfully told me that she could find no other employment to support her two-year-old son. I shall see the woman who had an abortion and is haunted by guilt and remorse but did the best she could faced with grueling alternatives; the businessman besieged with debt who sold his integrity in a series of desperate transactions; the insecure clergyman addicted to being liked, who never challenged his people from the pulpit and longed for unconditional love; the sexually abused teen



molested by his father and now selling his body on the street, who, as he falls asleep each night after his last 'trick', whispers the name of the unknown God he learned about in Sunday school.

'But how?' we ask.

Then the voice says, 'They have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

There they are. There \*we\* are - the multitude who so wanted to be faithful, who at times got defeated, soiled by life, and bested by trials, wearing the bloodied garments of life's tribulations, but through it all clung to faith." But through it all wept at the feet of Christ. That is my call to you today.

Please. When Jesus presents Himself and he will, trust me, He will. please rush to His feet and weep. Don't sit idly by. It may be the most unlikely Oak of righteousness that get's you there. It was one of those unexpected oaks that moved me. Amen.