

Luke 7:40-46

Jesus replied, “Simon, I have something to say to you.”

“Teacher, speak,” he said.

⁴¹“A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day’s work.^[a] The other owed enough money for fifty. ⁴²When they couldn’t pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?”

⁴³Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled.”

Jesus said, “You have judged correctly.”⁴⁴ Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn’t give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but she hasn’t stopped kissing my feet since I came in. ⁴⁶You didn’t anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on my feet.

God bless the reading, the hearing and the understanding of the scripture.

Thanks be to God.

A few verses preceding today’s scripture reading, vs 36, says, “When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.” And we know from the scripture that was read, the Pharisees name was Simon. The fact that Simon invited Jesus to have dinner with him is very significant. This invitation indicates that the host viewed his guest as a social equal, in his case, as a respected rabbi.

Even though there is evidence that Simon respected Jesus as an equal, he did not even fulfill the basic duties of a host. He didn't offer any water for washing his feet, which may sound like an odd act of hospitality for those of us today in the twenty-first century, but for a first century Judean, it was a common courtesy extended to guests, because sandaled feet got very dirty. And then there was the anointing of the head, an act of respect given to any honored guest, and yet in this case, there was no anointing of his head, nor kiss of greeting that may not have been required, but certainly expected as a gesture of hospitality.

Of course, the woman, labeled a “sinner” in Simon’s mind, if not with his mouth, essentially fulfilled this role, or at least made her own humble attempts to fulfill the role of the host. She brought an alabaster jar of ointment, which she probably intended to anoint Jesus’ head with. The problem was, she couldn't reach his head because of the manner in which the guests were positioned. Remember, verse 36, indicates that Jesus was reclined, informing us that this was a banquet. Guests normally

reclined on mats or couches around a short table. They would lean on their left elbow, feed themselves with their right hand, while their legs were extended behind them.

Another common aspect of feasts and banquets is that the hosts or guests would pose riddles for one another in a contest of wit and wisdom. Jesus, having realized the condition of Simon's heart, posed a riddle based on the convention of patron client relationships. He said, "A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day's work. The other owed enough money for fifty. When they couldn't pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?" (vs 41-42)

Simon replied, in verse 43, "I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled." Jesus then pointed out the irony, that the woman, whom Simon mentally classified as a sinner, may not have anointed his head with oil, or brought him a bowl of water, she did clean his feet with her own tears. And not having a towel, she used her own hair to dry those feet. She then emotionally kissed and anointed those now clean feet with the perfume she had originally brought for his head. The whole scene reveals a spontaneous and dramatic expression not only of hospitality but of gratitude. What she did was a modified version of first century hospitality 101.

Some of you may remember a few years back, before the pandemic when we were going through the MCCI process, that is the Missional Church Consultation Initiative, we had secret worshippers join us and rate their worship experience. The survey they took included what kind of hospitality they received as first time guests.. When I pondered today's scripture I couldn't help but wonder, how such secret guests might have rated Simon a Pharisee, and how such secret guests might have rated the woman defined by sin.

First century Judeans placed a high priority on hospitality, and yet the Pharisee of this story, Simon, failed to do even the basics, while this "sinner" of a woman, who, because she didn't have a bowl of water or a towel, clipped in, inventing an even higher level of hospitality, humbly using what she had, her tears and her hair.

Of course we have a hard time relating to their level of hospitality. We don't wash one another's feet, and we don't need them to be washed because we have closed toed shoes. We don't anoint our guests head with oil. I mean the closest thing to it is we might smudge a symbol of the cross on somebody's forehead for special services like the confirmands rite of intention or a healing service. Do you think the people in today's scripture would have smudged a cross sign on anyone's forehead? Of course not. The cross was a tool of execution. No, they didn't smudge a cross or any other symbol with oil on anyone's body. No, they "bathed their head with oil," so much so it dripped down. And we Caucasian Americans, especially in the Midwest are not in the practice of greeting one another with a kiss. But these things were basic forms of hospitality in Jesus' day.

So, if these are not the basics hospitality practices in the 21st century home, than what are the basics of hospitality? This is not rhetorical.

(Bonnie, hopefully some people will offer some spontaneous answers to that question that you may not hear. I will try repeating them in the hopes you can hear them.

If no one offers any I will provide unscripted answers myself.)

I have a question in relation to this... do we offer the same level of hospitality to first time guests in the church as we would in the privacy of our homes? I mean, since many of us see the church as our family, it stands to reason that this is our home. How do we treat first time guests to our church home? Think about that.

In just a moment you're going to witness a skit. The scene is obviously going to be in a church, but as you see the skit unfold I want you to ask yourself the question, if you had a get together in your home, let's say an open house, and of course friends will be there, but what if I asked them to invite their friends. What if they invited people who had never been to your home before; people you had never met, would your hospitality look like this?

Skit:

A church member named Howard (Brantmeyer) approaches an unnamed church member, (Pastor Vicki) who asks the Howard how his mission trip was.

While the two are talking, a first time guest (Tom Hirschinger) walks in looking around like he's trying to figure out where he should go. He sees the two talking, considers asking them, but decides not to interrupt. The guest walks to the other end of the room, but turns around comes right up to the two church members, but they stay focused on their conversation.

The unnamed member, noticing someone is standing right there, gives the guest a polite, "Hi," but is still more engaged in listening to Howard.

The guest eventually interjects a meek, "Excuse me," at which time the member looks to the guest, but her body language still indicates she's not breaking away from her conversation.

Member asks, "Can I help you?"

The Guest asked "Where do I go for the church service?"

Member answers "Oh, in the sanctuary." She starts to get back to her conversation with Howard, but then the guest again interrupts.

The Guest, "Ahhh, where is the sanctuary?"

Member answered, "Oh, just go to the other end of the Narthex turn right at the double doors. You can't miss it." She immediately gets back into the conversation with Howard.

The guest wanders away wondering what a Narthex is. After he exits the room, Howard asked member 2, "Who was that?"

Member answers, "I don't know... Let's ask Kathy, she's the greeter, she should know who he is."

The two of them walk out the door, and the scene changes to the entrance to the sanctuary, with the Greeter (Kathy Jennings) standing ready to welcome worship attenders with bulletins in hand. Two additional members (Cindy Cseri and Tina Straw) are chatting with the greeter.

Meanwhile, the first two members walk down the aisle towards Kathy and when she sees Howard, she enthusiastically greets him, "Howard, I see you made it back from your mission trip. Are you staying for coffee after worship? I want to hear all about it."

Member asked, "Kathy what was the name of that gentleman in the green polo shirt and khakis. We sent him your way just a couple of minutes ago."

Kathy answers, "Oh I don't know. He asked me where he should sit. I told him any space that is empty, just don't sit on somebody's lap we're a friendly church, but not that friendly."

Member, nudges Howard, "Let's go ask Kay. Kay knows everybody."

(End of skit)

What was wrong with this picture? Is that how you would welcome people into your home? And yet these are common examples of what happens when someone comes to a church for the first time. Hopefully not all of them at one time. We see ourselves as friendly but who are we friendly to? Oh, but we don't wait for the first-time guests to hunt us down before we say "hi." In fact, we turn to face them look them right in the eye and say "Hi." I do that in public places I may even add a subtle wave.

Let me ask you a question, if someone you've never met entered your home, would you just say hi? I mean depending on the circumstances you would do a lot more than say hi right. But again imagine it was that open house, if a friend invited someone you don't know, someone who had never been inside of your house, would you just say hi? No, of course not. You'd ask them questions about themselves right. So let's say you clip in to that next level of hospitality by asking their name.

Now, keep in mind this person has never been to your home, what do you do if they ask you if they may use the bathroom? Do you just say yes? Of course not. They're not really asking for permission; they are asking for directions. So do you say to them something like, "Sure, it's right across the hallway from little Suzie's bedroom." Of course not. They don't even know Suzie let alone where she sleeps. These are common courtesies that we get when we are in the comfort of our own private homes, but we somehow forget to extend the same courtesies here at the church.

I know what you're thinking, "But Pastor, what about my friends? I haven't seen them since last week? What do I do if I am already talking to somebody?" If you are talking to someone who has been to this church for more than one time and you see someone you don't recognize, someone who may even look dazed and confuse, this is what you do (I hold up a finger to acknowledge to the person to hold that thought). If you are talking to someone who has been to this church more than one time, they should know that we hold hospitality to first time guests as a priority. Your friend will understand, your friend will forgive the interruption.

We see this church as a family and that is great, but it is vital that we treat the first time guest as if they are already a part of this family. It's how we live out part B of the greatest commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. You know we often view Jesus as having been the first one to name that phrase, but where did he get it? The Hebrew scriptures, more specifically Leviticus 19:18 "You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself." And lest you think this directive is aimed only at your people, you know, the ones who are already part of the church family, guess again, drop down several verses to verse 34a, which states, "You must treat the outsider as one of your native-born people... and you are to love [the outsider] in the same way you love yourself."

Hospitality was a big deal back thousands of years ago, you'll hear more about that next week, but we need to make it a big deal here and now. And, I've got a tool to help us with that it's called the 5-10-Link Rule, and I'm going to have the hosts pass out a card to help you remember this rule.

The number five refers to time. The first five minutes before worship, and first five minutes after worship. The rule is that during these two segments of time, before you start greeting the friend you talked to last Sunday, you take the initiative to meet someone new to you. It doesn't even have to be a first-time guest, it can be someone who normally sits five pews away from you for the last 50 years but you just never took the time to get to know them. This is the priority five minutes before worship and five minutes after worship.

The next point in the 5-10-Link Rule is 10, which refers to space. When someone you don't know comes within 10 feet of you, take a moment to introduce yourself and get to know them. And if you are already engaged in a conversation with some of your friends all the better, because that gives you the opportunity to apply the third point, the Link in the 5-10-Link Rule.

The Link of the rule is that after you introduce yourself, introduce them to the friends you are talking with. For example, let's say in the skit, instead of ignoring the first time guest I put my finger up to let Howard know to hold that thought, and I introduced myself, my name is Vicki, what is yours, of course that was Tom. I could say something like, I'm so glad to meet you, let me tell you I was just talking to Howard right here, Howard this is Tom, Howard just got back from a mission trip to

Midwest Mission and he was telling me all about it. So, I've not only introduced myself, I'm giving them a sense of belonging by introducing them to another member of the family.

But let's say you see someone and you introduce yourself, but you're not in conversation with anyone at the time, how do you link someone to another person. Now if you clip in to that next level of hospitality you are learning about the person and that gives you information about them to help you connect them with someone who has something in common with them. For example, let's say in the skit instead of ignoring the guest or just flippantly waved a hello to him, what if I introduced myself, got to know his name, which in this case was Tom. I might say "It's good to meet you Tom. Do you live here in Reedsburg?"

Tom answers, "Yes."

"That's great, what part of town are you at?"

"Over on Barbara Ann drive"

"Ohhh, over on the Ernstmeyer development. Do you know Kathy Jennings?"

"No, I don't"

"You know I should introduce you to her, she lives over on that side of town. In fact, I think she actually has some grandkids who live on Barbara Ann Drive, the Hirschingers? Do you know them?... Anyways I think Kathy is actually greeting today let me go introduce you to her."

We make hospitality so much harder than it has to be. We are afraid to introduce ourselves to someone because what if they have been coming here for the last 50 years and I never did the honors before. If that's the case, there is a good chance one of two things is happening: either they know your name, but it's because your doing one of the more overt forms of service in the church. You're one of the hosts, you've sung a solo, you've read scripture, all of these things and many more puts your name out there for people to see. So they "know" you, but let's be honest don't really *know* you.

Another thing that can happen, is when you introduce yourself just someone who's been coming to the church for the past 50 years, they may very well be thinking the same thing when they see you. One of you has to make the first move at introducing yourselves. I would rather risk offending someone by asking them their name, than to have them going away feeling like they were the invisible man. We need to take that chance, we need to clip in to that next level of hospitality. Because you are the hospitality team of this church.

Let us pray.

Next Steps

○ I will ponder/memorize/meditate on, Leviticus 19:34a You must treat the outsider as one of your native-born people...and you are to love [the outsider] in the same way you love yourself.

- I will get in the habit of applying the 5-10-Link Rule.
- I will recommend RUMC to someone. Worship services are:
 - _____ Live 9:00am at 833 3rd Street, Reedsburg
 - _____ YouTube Sunday afternoon
 - _____ Reedsburg TV Station 11.1 Tuesday at 3:00
- I will read/meditate on Judges 19:1-20 in preparation for next Sunday's worship.
- I will continue to support RUMC through my prayers, presence, gifts, services, and witness.
- I will attend the remainder of the sermon series Clip In.
- I will pray the breakthrough prayer at 8:33 am & 8:33 pm:
 - All loving God it is by your grace we thrive.
 - Continue guiding us in using your Spirit
 - to boldly move us in fulfilling your purposes.
 - We name it! We claim it, in Jesus' name. Amen