

# Embodying Grace & Peace | How to Be the Church

## “Perspectives On Hospitality”

Luke 7.31-ff; Hebrews 13.1-2; 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4.8-10; Romans 12.9-13  
7.10.22

*Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup> And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, <sup>38</sup> and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. <sup>39</sup> Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."*

*<sup>40</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." <sup>41</sup> "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup> Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." <sup>44</sup> Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. <sup>46</sup> "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. <sup>47</sup> "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." <sup>49</sup> Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7.31ff)*

*Let love of the brethren continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13.1-2)*

*Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.<sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaint. <sup>10</sup> As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4.8-10)*

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.<sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; <sup>11</sup> not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, <sup>13</sup> contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Romans 12.9-13)*

**We're looking at HOW TO BE THE CHURCH** – all these imperatives, command-words, telling us how to express the central ethic of God's Kingdom – LOVE – to one another in the Body of Christ.

Last week we touched on the topic of hospitality and this week we hope to unfold that a little more, seeing a few places in the New Testament where this idea is emphasized... And as we saw last week that

love can, if we're not careful, love can degrade and become insincere and hypocritical... or even worse...NICE.

And this week, an example of hospitality that went terribly wrong. At the event there was an apparently uninvited guest who was what we might call a "hot mess" who really ruined the decorum and dignity of the meal... The whole story becomes (among other things) a case-study in hospitality – perspectives on hospitality.

In this super-awkward and super-wonderful dining experience we get some perspectives on hospitality that might clarify what real hospitality IS and how to practice or pursue hospitality in our own modern context. Let's look at:

- 1) **Perspectives on Hospitality**
- 2) **What Makes Effusive Love Possible**
- 3) **Adopting the New Perspective**

The context of this passage in Luke finds Jesus Christ confronting the theologians and clergymen of His day for their rejection of John the Baptist because they thought John was too... austere and somber.

And NOW, the scholars and religious leaders were rejecting Jesus because He wasn't austere enough. John was always fasting – he was like the embodiment of the Law – the bad news that we all break God's commands more often and more seriously than we think we do! John called the people to MOURN.

Jesus Christ was like the embodiment of God's promises. He celebrated God's grace and the Good News that God – through Him – was making the way for sinners to be forgiven and given new life. So, Jesus ate meals and drank wine with sinners. And the Pharisees criticized that. So, Jesus Christ says, "You experts don't see what's going on... You won't mourn with John and you won't celebrate with Me because you fail to spiritually discern the simplest truths that John and I represent."

Jesus says, "You're like children playing Red Rover but when it's your turn to run... you don't. Or when the leader says, 'Simon says, touch your nose' – you just look totally puzzled and confused. They say you never forget how to ride a bicycle – but you guys have forgotten how to play... forgotten how to be childlike... You're all too grown up for your own good!... But wisdom is proven by all the children of wisdom..."

*And then...one of the "children of wisdom" steps up to ask Jesus Christ for lunch...EXCEPT...this child of wisdom isn't so wise... and isn't really a child...too adult to play.*

So Jesus Christ enters this home of Simon the Pharisee, for what will certainly be a pleasant time and reclines at the table. It was likely a triclinium (lit three couches) where the eaters would lay down on a futon-type cushion with a very low table...probably in a courtyard.

And then...in comes this notoriously sinful woman, probably a prostitute... And it's a situation! All our senses are engaged – the sound of weeping, the view of her standing there... the feel of her tears on the

feet of Jesus and of her hair (women didn't let down their hair in public - but she doesn't seem to know better). The fragrance of the expensive perfume – all senses!

But what's WORSE...is the fact that Jesus Christ doesn't know better. "Is this Man from the backwoods town of Nazareth REALLY this naïve and inexperienced that He doesn't 'know what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him...that she is a sinner!'"

"This Man, Jesus, is called a prophet?... And yet He can't make this simple, basic deduction that any teenager or even a boy or girl could make – how can He fail to see her multitude of sins? Even a child could see it. He can't see what's obvious to anyone!"

Jesus apparently reads what Simon is thinking and answers him (Hmmm... maybe Jesus is more discerning than Simon knows). Jesus says, "I have something to say to you (Simon means "to hear" but WILL he hear?)

"A lender had two debtors – one owed 500 days' wages and the other owed 50 (i.e., one tenth the debt of the other) and when neither could repay the debt, the lender (get this!): '...he graciously forgave them both' so which one will love him more."

"I SUPPOSE the one whom he forgave more" – You hear the disdain in his forced answer. He's evidently a smug man... arrogant and condescending to Jesus. THAT IS NOT good hospitality!

HE'S also a shallow man: he has no ability to see beyond a surface appearance. It's like he has no awareness at all that maybe...just possibly Jesus sees or hears something that Simon doesn't. He's a dolt.

In a moment we learn that Simon is not only smug and shallow but also stingy – he was apparently frugal to a fault. He withheld from his guest all the usual symbols of welcome and comfort and kindness. He provided no water for washing; no display of affection/greeting, no oil or lotion in that dry climate. It didn't feel like Jesus was even wanted at this meal....never mind welcome!

And lastly... Simon was smug, shallow, stingy and... he was "sanctified". I mean he saw himself as being very serious about obeying God and keeping God's Law. You can imagine him saying (at least in his heart), "Oh, yeah, Jesus: where does it say in the Law that I have to kiss You or provide lotion...gimme chapter and verse!" He saw himself as having very little (if any!) debt of sin to be forgiven... "I'm not perfect (no one is!) but I'm at least 10x better than she is!"

And now we turn our attention to the uninvited guest who actually showed Jesus Christ the true hospitality denied Him by the host, Simon. This woman is a hot mess and has no manners – she's crying like a baby. She's taking center-stage and ruining everything like a spoiled teenager... and putting her hands all over this "holy man" and the tears and the perfume and hair – she's uncouth; she's vulgar and ...sleazy.

And Jesus Christ has the nerve to ask this "holy" host, (v. 44), "*Simon, do you see this woman?*"

“Are you kidding me? She’s ALL I see! Once again, this Jesus makes clear that He has NO DISCERNMENT, no wisdom, no insight, no regard for God’s Law – this Jesus is no prophet – He’s a naïve child.”

See, Simon is soooo mature; so grown up – he’s forgotten how to ride a bike. He no longer remembers how to play, “Red Rover” and “Kick the Can” and “Simon Says”. His heart has become serious and not fun... His heart is dull – God is in his dining room and Simon is too grown up to even notice. Poor Simon.

But... truth is... Simon doesn’t see her. He doesn’t see the most significant things about her. He doesn’t see that she recognizes Jesus of Nazareth as the One against whom her sins have been committed and therefore the only One who can forgive her. (If I’m sitting with a friend and you come and punch him in the nose – I can’t say, “I forgive you” – it wasn’t MY nose!) She somehow knows that God is reclining at that table and God has acknowledged her and forgiven her!

And she sees herself accurately...in a way that Simon never has. Truth IS – they’re BOTH great big sinners but she sees herself accurately and he doesn’t.

And – not only does she have a view of God and a view of self that Simon doesn’t have... she has an accurate view of other people. How hard it would’ve been for a known prostitute to come to a clergy lunch.

But it wasn’t hard for HER. She sees God as big and people as small. The sense of forgiveness and extreme relief; the sense that she’s in the Presence of God Himself – is overwhelming all her fear of people.

They’re judging her clothing, her hair, her tears, her morality, her perfume and her fanatical, weird behavior and she just doesn’t even care. She’s dancing like no one is watching (I saw a VBS girl a few weeks ago – singing at the start of the worship service – and she was dancing and singing out LOUD... I thought, “why can’t we stay that way, unafraid of what people think?”)

Our unnamed sister – the sinful and forgiven woman – she’s showing Jesus Christ true hospitality and full welcome. In time she likely learned that Jesus Christ is indeed the only One who can forgive sin because all sin is against Him. He is God incarnate and He came into the world to live obedient to God’s Law and to God’s heart. He came to settle the debt that she owed – the debt of big sinners and the debt of un-self-aware sinners like Simon – v. 42 *“When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both.”* Everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ is forgiven.

The resurrection proves it.

See the real... hospitable One in this passage is God. In Jesus Christ, He is welcoming sinners into His Presence. He is come to serve us in Jesus Christ. He gave us water for our feet – cleansing for our sins. He shed tears for us. He gave us the true kiss of acceptance and genuine affection and welcome. He anointed us with the oil of His Holy Spirit and makes us a fragrance for the world to smell. (*“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among*

*those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?" -- 2 Cor. 2.4-16)*

Jesus Christ IS the hospitality of God to all who believe. To believe Him is to know the kind of hope, relief, forgiveness, humility and blessed self-forgetfulness we see demonstrated in this ancient sister – a woman with great sins and great forgiveness leading to great LOVE.

Now, I'll close with some ways we can USE the Gospel to instill in us and cultivate in us this childlike type of hospitality that flows from a new view of God, self and others.

First, as I said last week: Try It! Think about and pray about inviting someone for coffee or a meal. If your home isn't good for that – maybe invite them out. Be creative – it's a childlike trait to be creative and think outside the box... So, TRY IT.

Second, try it with a stranger. The word used for hospitality in the passages is, as we said last week, "philozenia" – literally love of strangers. So, once you try your hand at (v.13) "the needs of the saints" then move out into asking strangers. Think about people from different cultural backgrounds... maybe neighbors you don't know. God traveled from heaven to earth to offer us forgiveness and to turn strangers into family "for you once were NOT A PEOPLE...but now the people of God" (1 Pet. 2.10)

Next, try it without complaint. First Peter CH 4: "Be hospitable without complaint..." and "Let love be without hypocrisy." This is where we really need God's grace because we can usually make ourselves do things we don't "want" to do but we need God to give us the right motives in doing so.

Marva Dawn wrote: *"all human efforts, all performance principles, will only bring failure and despair. Only when we are set free from the demands of the law, can we discover the Hilarity ("cheerfulness") of living in love through faith. Indeed this is not of ourselves, but a gift of grace."* (Truly the Community; pp 145-146)

Fourth, to be truly Christian in your hospitality you have to be where our ancient sister was. In other words, if you can see, vividly and powerfully that YOU are a big, BIG debtor...way more rebellious and unloving, more smug, shallow, stingy and "sancti...monious" than you realize and yet our Hospitable God wanted you, lived and died and rose in order to have you... And He is actively in love with you TODAY... Manning, Brennan wrote, "Living in awareness of our belovedness is the axis around which the Christian life revolves. Being the beloved IS our identity, the core of our existence. It is not merely a lofty thought, an inspiring idea, or one name among many. It is thē name by which God knows us and the way He relates to us." This woman was starting to see that and it set her free to love without complaint!

Fifth, you may know that the ancient Christians were often on the run...and hospitality was a necessity: you had to be willing to host your brothers and sisters so they wouldn't die. We may not BE in that same situation, but we have other reasons that hospitality is so crucial in our day. Our culture needs to see

God's hospitality IN our homes because our society continues its path toward isolation and loneliness. This is a big opportunity for the church.

We may be entertaining angels unawares (Heb 13.2)... and at the very least that means that our hospitality will likely be MORE consequential than we think it will.

Sixth, when you're in the place that this woman was in – and your forgiveness is vivid to you – you can overlook the things that normally bother you. Love covers a multitude of sins. Probably if you're oversensitive and irritable and everything seems to bug you...probably you're not fixed on the Gospel relief that's yours in Christ.

Last, the words are actually, "persecute hospitality" and the same word is used in the very next verse: "bless those who persecute you". To persecute hospitality means that you chase it... you pursue it and seek after it. In other words, it has to be cultivated and fostered.

It takes practice and gospel-inspired growth...so get after it because it never comes naturally. For people to feel the welcome of God in your home calls for YOU to feel God's welcome...But start now...it's a faith-adventure.