

Fed By Grace | Food in the Gospels

“Good Host /Bad Host ”

Luke 7.36ff

2.17.13

Now one of the Pharisees was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ 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, ³⁸ 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.

*³⁹ 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." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he replied, "Say it, Teacher." ⁴¹ "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² "When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly." ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ "You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. ⁴⁶ "You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ "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." ⁴⁸ Then He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." ⁴⁹ Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." **Luke 7.31-50***

We're looking at Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and especially how food figures into the teaching of Jesus – He uses food as a kind of object lesson (like a symbol or a point of reference) and it is often at food-events, at meals and gatherings that Jesus Christ does some of His most significant teaching.

We saw, last week that the religious people of the day were sort of scandalized by the way Jesus ate especially because He seemed to enjoy food and wine **AND** because He often ate (**and eating in that Mediterranean world was usually an intimate event**) and Jesus Christ often ate with notoriously sinful people.

In the verses before today's text Jesus is saying to the religious people, "You people didn't like John the Baptist because he didn't eat and drink and you don't like ME because I DO eat and drink! You call me a friend of sinners."

Then, in this scene, Jesus Christ is invited into the home of a religious scholar (kind of like a pastor or elder) and in comes a sinner – and it turns out – Jesus Christ IS the friend of sinners. He not only tolerates her excesses and bad manners but He extols her and defends her suggestive behavior.

And what becomes central in this episode is seeing. This is a scene and a conflict that brings out the whole matter of perspective...how we SEE life. (Christianity has been described as a way of seeing.) And this encounter introduces a way of seeing that goes way beyond religion or spirituality or morality. It opens up an approach to life that's un-self-conscious, self-forgetting and truly liberated.

First, we'll see an OLD WAY of SEEING, then a NEW WAY of SEEING and finally, WHAT YOU NEED TO START SEEING THIS WAY AND KEEP SEEING THIS WAY.

The old way of seeing is epitomized in Simon the Pharisee who invites Jesus Christ to this meal. And that's a good thing to do – I've been sometimes not-so-subtly urging us to eat together...because we don't. The numbers tell us that families don't eat together. A lot of people eat at their desks or in their cars. Leon Cass from University of Chicago (former chairman of the President's Council on BioEthics), Dr. Cass wrote a book called, **The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature**.

He argues that NOT eating together is leaving our whole culture socially, emotionally, relationally impoverished. So many of society's ills are traceable to this shift.

But, Simon the Pharisee DOES eat with people... so far so good. And He is apparently interested in Jesus Christ – and since eating with people in that culture was a sign of acceptance and friendship, we can assume that Simon thought highly of Jesus of Nazareth and at least respected Him. Many people in our time/place DON'T eat with others and may rarely extend hospitality...but Simon does.

If you had asked him about his relationship to Jesus Christ he might have said, "I INVITED Jesus into my home...have YOU?!" And yet, Simon's way of seeing is essentially shallow. He does indeed show Jesus hospitality but why?

Simon may have insisted, "It doesn't matter WHY – it only matters that...i.e. THAT I invited Him in and let the record show that I did!" But that's the old way of seeing, it's shallow, it only looks at surface compliance and not the motives and the reasons for the compliance. And when you scratch below the surface you notice that Simon's invitation had strings attached.

He wasn't only inviting Jesus; he was interviewing Jesus. He was scrutinizing Him. When that

sinful woman came into the courtyard where this dinner was being held (and we'll get to her in a moment) but when Jesus allowed her to carry on...Simon concludes, "Ah ha! This man MUST NOT be the prophet some people say He is! He fails the test!"

Point is – while Simon is outwardly hospitable, he is also lying in wait to **expose** Jesus and **to reject** Him!

Now, who wants to go to that kind of dinner party where you're being interviewed and where you have to measure up? I'd rather eat in my car.

Second, this old way of seeing is not only shallow; it's smug. He sees things in easy-to-manage neat little categories. Just like we saw last week – sinners and righteous, us and them, good and bad. This woman is in the bad category and Simon is in the good. If Jesus can't see that very clear distinction it means that He has no insight, no discernment; He's NOT a prophet! It's a very simple test – and Jesus fails!

This way of seeing is black and white. Everything has simple easy to identify properties and distinctions like mammals and birds – (mammals are warm blooded and have babies by live birth – very simple) but in Australia there's an animal called a duck-billed platypus ... And, this old way of seeing has no category for a mammal that lays eggs. And this smug person has to go into denial mode – he's unable to see any nuances or extenuating circumstances or shades or gradations. It insists on its own neat little ways and if you don't see things in these black and white terms, "well, what's wrong with you!"

(Stephen Covey illustration of the kids on the subway)

Thirdly, this old way, call it spirituality, morality, religion, is essentially stingy. When asked if he was a generous person Simon would have pointed to the evidence, how he had opened his doors to Jesus Christ and put food on the table...and he'd be right...

BUT...he was NOT a generous person. He was very considered and measured. Technically, he was hospitable but there was no effusive, genuinely open-hearted sharing. And that's what's so very hard about seeing this in ourselves (and we all have a little of this IN us) and what's so very, VERY hard about being around this kind of person. You can't prove that they are stingy because they'll point to their hospitality and who could argue with that?!

Jesus, however, points to these other, not strictly obligatory gestures but gestures that are more extra and more spontaneous and heartfelt – a foot-bath, a kiss, cologne. These would've been not just "Hospitality by the Book" but sincere, unforced expressions of welcome.

And that brings us to the uninvited guest, this sinful woman. Many people think that she was a prostitute but she may have gotten that label other ways; she may have been married to a local crime-figure.

She gained access to the dinner party, which wouldn't have been too hard (often dinners were held in these open-air courtyards). She has apparently had contact with Jesus Christ and knows that He's there. She expresses herself...NOT in any "Hospitality By the Book" way. Probably the guests are laying on mattresses (like a futon) and perpendicular to the table – i.e. with head by the table and feet stretched straight out. She's weeping (which is awkward!). She comes to Jesus Christ's feet and begins to cry tears onto His feet. She then uses her hair as a towel (to let her hair down in public would've been highly suggestive – like a woman showing up in a bathing suit top). She's weeping, wetting then drying His feet, kissing his feet. She's a hot mess.

Why is she carrying on this way? Why does Jesus allow it...why is Jesus so dumb? Well it's because of what she sees and what He sees **AND** what Simon does not see. Jesus makes this the point when he says to the host (v.44) "Simon, do you see this woman?"

I'm sure Simon wanted to say, "Are you kidding me!? She is all I see! She is dominating the whole dinner. She is ruining the whole dinner!"

But Jesus is actually saying, "What do you see when you look at her? How do you see the world? I see a woman who sees herself, sees others and sees God in a way that YOU don't see."

She is a woman who sees **herself** as a great big sinner. That was the point of the little parable: "A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have judged correctly."

Simon says, literally, "I TAKE it...the one whom he forgave more..." You feel the smugness in his answer. And Jesus Christ says, "you take it rightly and this woman is aware that she is a big debtor – she has an accurate self-image. BUT YOU, Simon, see yourself as a small debtor – you have an ***inaccurate self-image***. And it colors the way you see everything."

Now we can laugh at Simon here...but the truth is : it's difficult to see your own flaws. It's very difficult to see yourself truthfully. Just look at one of the talent shows, the contestants may be utterly convinced that they are "the next American idol" and sometimes they're shocked to find that they're not! And Jesus pointed to this difficulty in moral and spiritual people – very hard to see ourselves.

Secondly, she sees others accurately. She is not afraid of what people will think – she doesn't seem bothered at being judged. She's in love.

I had a dad tell me that his son was acting really strange. He was getting up early. Showering and spending a long time in front of the mirror, working around the house to do his chores without being told...turns out – the young man was in love.

Same with this woman: her love made other people NOT so powerful over her life. In the past, she would probably have avoided Simon and other moral people but now – something bigger was here.

And she had a new way of thinking about God. It wasn't that she simply feared God – which IS a good thing and which IS a motivational factor. But she is really moved to this expression of joy and generosity NOT by fear but by forgiveness.

She knows the God who forgives big sinners and little sinners – (v.42) “HE GRACIOUSLY FORGAVE THEM BOTH” – the word is really “He graced” them both. And the One telling the story, Jesus Christ, was the very embodiment of God's grace. He was there to pay for sins – and somehow this woman knew that about Him.

He came into the world to live the perfect expression of self-giving, effusive, love to the Father. He came to obey like neither the Pharisees or the sinners had ever obeyed. And He came to die so that religious sinners like stingy, shallow, smug Simon could be forgiven and that this hot mess of a sinful woman could be forgiven – came to pay a debt that they owed but could never pay. She saw that and it changed how she saw everything else!

Now how do you get this new way of seeing and how do you maintain it so you keep seeing this way?

When I say “a revelation” I mean that God has to give you eyes to see your need and His grace. The apostles prayed this way for the early Christians, e.g. **Ephesians 1.17** “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

Flannery O'Connor wrote an amazing short story called, *Revelation*. Mrs. Turpin walks into very small doctor's office waiting room with her husband Claude. She has been coming to a conviction that she is... as she calls it, “Blessed by Jesus” – She and Claude not only own their own house but own their own land. And she's coming to see that all of society is arranged in a kind of order of blessing. Some, like she and Claude own land (**truth is they own a very small piece of land**) then the homeowners, then people who are (as she says) “common”, then the white trash and “the coloreds”.

And she finds several of these types in the waiting room. Some white-trashy people with a runny nosed baby with no shoes (what **are** people thinking?!) There's a girl about 20 with bad acne and reading a book called *Human Development* (Mrs. Turpin doesn't recognize it...she determines that the girl is common – turns out the girl attends a Wellesley College)...then a number of other common people...and **no one** like her and Claude...until she notices right next to her...a woman well dressed and wearing very tasteful jewelry. Finally! Someone like her with whom she can converse. (Turns out the lady is very wealthy...and non-pretentious...and kind).

And Mrs. Turpin in her very mannerly, genteel way begins to talk about how glad she is that “Jesus has organized my life as He has...” And the wealthy lady is trying to look interested but truth is...however mannerly Mrs. Turpin is...she is smug, shallow and stingy... and blind to how her comments are dripping with prejudice and condescension.

And suddenly the girl with acne stands up and hurls her textbook at Mrs. Turpin and then lunges at her and begins to choke her.

They have to sedate the girl and while they’re waiting for the police to arrive...the horrified woman stands over the acne girl and says, “Well...don’t you have anything to say to me?” and the girl whispers, “Go back to hell where you came from you old warthog”.

Then in the final scene, it’s dusk...Mrs. Turpin keeps asking Claude, “What did she mean? I don’t get it Claude...what was she trying to tell me...I’m not a warthog am I, Claude...am I?” And Claude says, Oh she was just crazy...just try and forget it.”

But...of course... she can’t. She goes out back to feed the pigs...and stands there looking at the sunset...and the clouds are in a line...and she has ...a revelation. She sees a vast procession of people waling up the clouds...like a bridge to heaven.

They’re dancing and shouting and singing, “Hallelujah ...Hallelujah!” And it’s all the white trash and the coloreds and the common, poor people...and they’re singing all out of tune and off pitch... *“And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They, alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces even their virtues were being burned away.”*

See, we need this revelation everyday. Even our virtues can not be our source of confidence. We are all cracked and in need of mending.

The Friend of sinners was saying to Simon, “Do you see? Do you see yourself as better than this woman? Do you see yourself as a small sinner? Then you’ll only have small love...a stingy, smug, shallow kind of reception for Jesus Christ. And you’ll have a weird/warped way of thinking about yourself, others and God. Even if you **ARE** on key.

But to be astounded at the VAST love of God for a wretch like me...to have that daily revelation...even if it hurts like a book in the head...like being called an old warthog...to have that daily revelation, that I am a great sinner and Jesus Christ is the Friend of sinners...and a Friend to me...THAT will set us free to really love and really live.