

Pastor's Devotional January 28, 2018

In our previous devotional (Jan 14), we glimpsed Jesus' pattern of hanging out with "sinners." After Jesus invited Levi the tax collector to be a disciple, Levi invited Jesus to his house for a feast with his tax collector friends. Levi (who changed his name to Matthew/"disciple") wanted his friends to meet Jesus. On his Father's mission to redeem and restore the lives of broken people, Jesus treasured such meals. He enjoyed sharing himself with "sinners" and relished their openness to God's reign, despite the criticism of religious people.

Jesus also ate with religious people. He may not have enjoyed the Pharisees as much, but Jesus loved everyone, and didn't turn down free food! Today we read of his dinner with Simon, a strict Pharisee. **Read Luke 7:36-50.**

This meal wasn't much fun. Without the interruption, it would have been dreary. Simon didn't provide Jesus with water to wash his feet, nor did he offer the traditional Middle Eastern welcome. Though playing host to Jesus, Simon the Pharisee wasn't gracious nor grateful.

From Simon's comment, it's likely that the un-named woman was an adulteress, maybe a prostitute. Her uninhibited act of worship is an awesome portrait of the impact Jesus' message of grace on someone who knows her need—immense gratitude plus determination to change.

Her shocking behavior was awkward, yet Jesus welcomed her unabashed devotion—washing his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, anointing them with expensive perfume. Ironically, even as she cleaned his feet, by touching Jesus the adulteress made him ceremonially unclean. In it we glimpse the "Great Exchange" that will transpire on the cross—Jesus gives us his righteousness in exchange for our unrighteousness.

After hearing his disgust, Jesus used a parable to hold up a mirror to Simon, so that he might recognize his hard heart. Two men had debts they could not pay. Both were forgiven what they owed by the moneylender. In the ancient Middle East, being forgiven even 50 denarii (50 days wages) would be an experience of great joy. A man forgiven 500 denarii would be ecstatic.

Even the most religiously dutiful person falls way short of God's holiness. Yet self-delusion is common among devout persons, who tend to think that "I'm not that bad." Forgetting how far we fall short of God's holiness, we can lose the joy that comes in discovering that we are saved by grace. Even worst, religious people rarely share our Lord's great passion to help wayward and broken find their way home. We should heed Jesus' ironic warning: "Whoever [thinks] he has been forgiven little loves little."

Steve Brown wrote, "I believe we show our depravity less by the bad stuff we do than by our reversion to Pharisaism. It is not our sin that is so bad (Jesus fixed that on the cross), but our stiffness—there is something about religion that can make you cold, critical, and mean."

So what's the remedy? Remember your sin and celebrate God's grace! **When you finish this devotional, sit in silence for a few minutes.** Think on what you are like at your worst—your attitudes and behaviors. (This is not to be shared!) Then try to imagine how much God treasures you. Remembering Luke's famous parable, take this to heart: if you are a prodigal, the Father yearns for your homecoming. If you are a dutiful older brother, the Father wants you to share His joy in welcoming your prodigal brother to the table of grace.

In our quest to become more missional, we imitate Jesus as we seek social encounters with friends and neighbors who are far from God, because God is not far from them. If we are safe and careful, eating and drinking with others is part of enjoying life. Let's help our religious friends become people of grace! After all, the greatest enjoyment comes when social interactions provide the opportunity to share His joy!