

Luke 7.36-50

Wycliffe Hall, Preaching Class, 28 November 2006

Read 36-39.

Simon was a Pharisee. He got religion. In our passage today, he was right, and he was wrong.

He was right because the woman was a sinner. She was a prostitute. She hadn't covered her hair, she touched an unmarried man's feet in public. When Simon looked at her, he saw her sin. He was right: the woman was a sinner.

But he was wrong as well. He thought that if Jesus were really a prophet, he'd have nothing to do with such a sinner. He thought the best thing to do to sin was to separate yourself away from it, so it doesn't contaminate you. He thought sin should be treated like an infectious disease, and needed to be quarantined.

Let's just stop there for a moment and catch our breath.

If sin is about separation from God, it wants to be, and to push us, as far away from God as possible. If sin is about separation from God, it wants to be, and to push us, as far away from God as possible. Sin's goal is to drive us apart, to separate us from God, and from each other.

Do you see how Simon wants what sin wants? Separation. He was to be separated from it and sinful people, and it wants to separate him from sinful people and God.

If God were like Simon, sin would have won. The separation would be enforced from both sides. God and sin would be pulling further and further apart. God would be unable to endure our sinful company, just as Simon couldn't bear to be with the sinful prostitute.

Now, we all know that God is holy, especially after chapel this morning. God really hates sin. But he's smarter than sin. He knows that if he stays secure in his holiness, separate from the world, sin would win.

So he doesn't. He sends Jesus to the world, to be surrounded by sin and sinful people. Instead of pulling away from the scandalous touch of the town prostitute, Jesus allows her to worship him, to thank him, to respond to what he's done for her. So what has he done?

Read 40-50.

What if Jesus isn't primarily trying to insult Simon's hospitality here? I would like to bring two things out of this second part of the passage.

First, remember what I said about separation? I ended with the question: what has Jesus done for the woman?

In this short passage he shows how he allowed the woman to touch him, to kiss him, to anoint him. Instead of trying to separate himself from her and her sin, as Simon did, he allowed her to embrace him. She could not have got much closer.

In this passage we see that God's solution to sin is not to separate himself from it, but to become like those caught up in it, to kill it dead in his own body on the cross. We couldn't draw near to him, so he drew near to us. He crossed the void of separation by sin, and drew near to us by his Son.

Second, Jesus makes it clear that Simon needs forgiveness, just as much as the woman. Simon thought he was distancing himself from sin, cutting himself off from it, making himself more holy by separating himself from it. But he wasn't. The more he thought he was, the more he judged other people as sinners, and himself as righteous, the more mired in sin he became.

Do you really, honestly think of yourself as a sinner? Especially now that you're one of the chosen ones, in a theological college, some of us accepted by the Church of England as ordinands? We are going to run churches – do you believe you are as sinful as the people that fill the pews?

We're now going to spend a few moments thinking about the way we judge others' sin, ignoring our own, and then about what we deserve to be judged for.

So first, what do you judge people for? Do you judge them for being too intellectual? Too narrow-, or too broad-minded? For not being mission-minded? For ignoring the importance of pastoral care? Do you judge them when they sit in church smelling of cigarettes? Or when they dress inappropriately?

When do you look down on others: what do you judge people for?

Second, what do you think you should be judged for? Are you too proud, too arrogant? Do you act like you are always right, that you know best? Are you in love with vain philosophy, are you in love with yourself?

What do you deserve to be judged for?

Now that we have been convicted of our sinful behaviour by God, what do we do?

Well, I'm going to let Jesus do the talking. He knows your thoughts, as he knew Simons, what you're really like, as he knew the prostitute. When we recognise and confess our sins, he already knows, and he still loves us.

Whatever you thought of in the times of silence just now, if you regret them, say sorry to God now, in the silence of your own heart.

Jesus says this: 'Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'

Never judge others, and never judge yourself: the job of judging belongs to Jesus. He frees us of that terrible responsibility.

Instead, hear these words that Jesus spoke; remember them when you are tempted to judge yourself, or someone else. Remember them, repent and believe:

'Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'