

Wednesday Worship—People Jesus Met

29th July 2020

Simon the Pharisee

Opening prayers

“The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ our Lord be with you.

All **Amen**

God of space, sea and sky,
of cloud, sun and rainbow,
of oak, leaf and acorn,
of candle, flame and wax,
of storm, flood and rainbow,
of journey, pause and destination,
of spring, river and ocean,
of pebble, rock and cliff face,
of mirror, reflection and mystery,
of flower, petal and stamen,
of dance, song and merriment,
of country, continent and borders,
of gold, diamond and cobalt,
of industry, office and school,
of sleep, dream and rest,
of butterscotch, honey and meringue,
of word, sentence and praise,
of yarn, stitch and tapestry,
of pollen, honey and mead,
of head, arm and heart,
of computer, spreadsheet and Twitter,
of moment, days and eternity.
God of us all, bless us.

(Judy Dineen, adapted)

All **Amen**

Introduction

In this, the third in our series on ‘People Jesus Met’, we come to the house of Simon the Pharisee. Mostly when we think about this story we focus on the woman who comes in, but Simon is also an interesting character in himself as someone who was interested in Jesus but didn’t understand him.

Hymn: *I danced in the morning*

Prayers with lighting of a candle

Welcome, Lord,
All we celebrate your presence.

Welcome, Comforter,
All touch our souls with your peace.

Welcome, Awakener,
All touch our souls with your life.

Welcome, Disturber,
All touch our souls with your truth.

1st Reading: Jeremiah 7.1-15

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.

Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are safe!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the Lord. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, says the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently, you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim.

Prayer of response

Lord deliver us,
from speaking pious words
but not acting according to your will.
Open our ears to hear you speaking,
our hearts to care for others,
our wills to remain set in your paths,
and our hands to do your bidding.
All Amen.

Psalm 103.6-18

The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.

Prayer of response

Lord, we thank you
that you are a God of both justice and mercy.
We rejoice in your compassion
and in the knowledge of your faithfulness.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: James 2.1-4

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Prayer of response

Lord, forgive us
when we judge people by appearances or worldly standards.
Help us to see people as you see them:
beloved children made in your image.

All **Amen.**

3rd Reading: Luke 7.36-50

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.' Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' 'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' Then turning towards 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Prayer of response

Lord our God,
at times you surprise us,
shaking us out of our assumptions
about God, sin, forgiveness and faith.
May we always be ready to receive you with joy,
open to being surprised,
and eager to learn from you.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: There's a wideness in God's mercy

Reflection

I'm reading a novel at the moment called Miss Benson's Beetle. The plot isn't important just now, although it's very good, but the story does use an interior monologue.

That is, we hear the thoughts of the main character and of some of the other characters as if we were in their head.

This is such a common thing in books these days we don't really notice it, but it was very rare at the time when Luke's Gospel was written.

So, the fact that Luke uses it in the story we've heard today is significant.

When the woman comes in and bathes Jesus's feet with her tears, Simon, the host of the gathering, says to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner".

In all the other gospel accounts objections are made out loud to the woman's actions.

Mark refers to the onlookers objecting among themselves, Matthew highlights the disciples complaining, and John gives us Judas's objection.

Only Luke talks about Simon reacting silently to himself and Jesus being able to pick up on this.

In this we see a fulfilment of Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2 that in Jesus the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed.

As I've already mentioned, it's rare to find internal monologue in writing from this time.

When it was used it was generally at a time of crisis, when a hero was experiencing a deep inner conflict.

There was often a set formula: introduction to the monologue, taking stock of the problem, the hero's chosen solution.

A bit like 'Once upon a time', followed by a witch's curse and then a hero saving the day.

However, Luke twists things a bit because he always gives us the inner thoughts of someone who's self-centred, based on the Jewish idea that what a person says to themselves reveals whether they are wise or foolish.

So, in giving us Simon's inner thoughts Luke is showing us both what Simon is like and that he's faced with a choice to make about Jesus.

First, what is Simon like?

Well, based on this story he's someone interested enough in Jesus to want him in his house.

As a curiosity to show off?

To stir up controversy?

Genuine interest?

We can't know but there are clues that Simon isn't particularly attentive to Jesus as he doesn't carry out any of the basic duties of a host caring for his guests.

He doesn't make sure Jesus's feet are cleaned, he doesn't welcome him properly with a kiss of peace, and he doesn't anoint Jesus in the set way.

This doesn't sound like someone warmly disposed towards Jesus but more like someone wrapped up in himself.

Second, Simon is faced with a choice.

When the woman comes in Simon has to decide whether Jesus really is a prophet sent by God, given that he doesn't seem to know that the woman touching him is a sinner.

According to Simon it's either/or: there's no room in his thinking for the possibility that Jesus might be a prophet who's different from what he expects a prophet to be.

He doesn't entertain the idea that maybe Jesus does know what this woman is like but his reaction is not the same as Simon's.

Simon, it seems, based on this story, has fixed ideas and expects God to act in accordance with them.

Simon also shows no willingness to engage with Jesus about any of this – but Jesus, in contrast, confronts him directly with a question that exposes Simon’s lack of love, hospitality and understanding, before making it clear that he does know exactly what kind of woman this is and that she’s forgiven

In the process, Jesus also makes it clear that he knows exactly what kind of person Simon is as well, and he doesn’t come out of the situation well.

But before we get carried away with pointing out all Simon’s faults in this story, we need to consider what Luke is trying to tell us.

Almost all of us have an internal monologue, apart from a few rare people, and it can have a huge impact on our lives.

An inner voice that’s always issuing critical, nasty, unkind or other negative thoughts will stop us being the kind of person Jesus wants us to be, whether that negativity is aimed at ourselves or others.

But an inner voice that’s growing more attuned to God, and focusing on things that are good, kind, encouraging and helpful, will help us blossom into the kind of people we are meant to be.

People who can look at Jesus accepting and forgiving a sinner and rejoice in his goodness to them and to us.

Intercessions

Blessed are you, eternal God,
All **to be praised and glorified for ever.**

Hear us as we pray for your holy catholic Church:
may all Christians be united in love and service,
may we remember your great love for us,
and may we be always ready to forgive as you have forgiven us.

All **Make us all one, that the world may believe.**

Inspire and lead those who hold authority
in the nations of the world.
Give them wisdom and courage
to face the current challenges,
compassion for the weak and vulnerable,
and a true desire to serve their people honestly and well.

All **Guide them in the ways of justice and peace.**

Make us alive to the needs of our communities,
at home, work, school and in the places we live and go.
May all feel cared for, respected and understood,
and may none feel they must suffer alone.

All **Help us to share each other’s joys and burdens.**

Deepen our compassion for all who suffer
from sickness, grief or trouble.
We especially pray for those suffering from covid-19,
those facing a long, painful road to recovery,
those who have lost loved ones,
and those working to help, heal and cure.

All **In your presence may they find their strength.**

We remember those who have died,
placing them into your hands confident in your love and mercy.
And we praise you for all your saints who have gone before
into your eternal glory.

All **Bring us all to share in your heavenly kingdom.**

All God of mercy,
**you know us and love us
and hear our prayer:
keep us in the eternal fellowship of
Jesus Christ our Saviour
Amen.**

All **Our Father, which art in heaven...**

Hymn: Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

Closing prayers

All Jesus, lord of time,
hold us in your eternity.

All Jesus, image of God,
travel with us the life of faith.

All Jesus, friend of sinners,
heal the brokenness of our world.

All Jesus, lord of tomorrow,
**draw us into your future.
Amen.**

The blessing of the quiet earth,
upholding us, strengthening us.

The blessing of the wind that blows,
inspiring us, exciting us.

The blessing of the fire that burns,
warming us, refining us.

The blessing of the water that flows,
delighting us, refreshing us.

The blessing of the God of life,
whom we come to know in Christ,
and who lives in us through the Spirit,
be ours this day, and always.

(Richard Sharples)

All

Amen.