

Second Sunday after Pentecost

“TEACHERS BECOME STUDENTS”

Luke 7:36–8:3

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Analysis by James Squire

7:36 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. 37 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. 38 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. 39 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." 40 Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." 41 "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 Then 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 bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 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.” 48Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

8:1Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, 2as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

DIAGNOSIS: Little Forgiveness, Little Love

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Unwashed Feet*

Who is the unwashed in this story? The Pharisee hosting the party has decided it is this woman who has crashed the party. If we were there, we would reach the same conclusion. She was uninvited, and probably for good reason considering the line of work she was in. What is more, she represents a lack of respect for the teachings of the church, and here she is among the church’s teachers. But that’s not the half of it. She has become the center of attention, and Jesus himself – the guest of honor – has turned her into a teacher. The unwashed lecturing the washed, facilitated by a quirky but respectable member of the guild. And we are expected to listen. So, again: who is the unwashed in this story?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *No Kiss Of Peace*

Who is the unfaithful one in this story who is disturbing the peace? Again, the Pharisee has rendered his verdict. He was hosting a nice little fellowship, a communion of rabbis, when

she crashed the party. Her uncleanness has ruined the gathering for him and probably most of his friends. Again, we would be right there with him, looking on in horror. She's not being faithful, she's sucking up to the guest of honor, trying to win his favor with her crocodile tears. And Jesus is falling head over heels for it. What kind of teacher is he, to be holding up this unclean woman as a role model for the rest of us? There is little doubt that the Pharisee has begun to regret his decision to invite Jesus into his midst. This Jesus, who came not to bring peace, but a sword (12:49-53), is a bit too much for us to take. He doesn't respect our customs. He doesn't appreciate our good intentions. He saves his praise and gratitude for this rude, unwashed, unprincipled party-crasher. And he wonders why we gave him no kiss of peace.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *No Place in the Kingdom*

Who is the one who is out of place in our story? We know what our answer would be: the same as the Pharisee's. The one who is out of place is most definitely the woman. Her demonstrative outburst has no place in the church. The flaunting of sacred traditions shall not be allowed, or we shall find another place to worship God as we see fit. And so, we depart from Jesus and resolve not to invite him into our midst again, believing that we can better worship and obey God without him. But, as Luke continues to unfold, Jesus keeps popping up in our path, and sooner or later we find we have to deal with his radical agenda. We can't just dismiss him from our lives. We may be able to crucify him, but to hope he will stay dead is naïve and deadly for us.

PROGNOSIS: Much Forgiveness, Much Love

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *Anointed with Love*

For all these presumptions of ours, Jesus begs his Father's forgiveness (23:34). And he does so from the most out-of-place spot imaginable: hanging from a tree outside the city walls like a common criminal. Moreover, this is where his new kingdom is established. This is the moment foreshadowed in our text. Jesus is the one being treated as unclean. Jesus is the one who needs a kiss of peace. Jesus is the one who needs to be anointed. It is this woman who has come to clean, kiss, and anoint Jesus. It is as if she is preparing him for what he must do on a hill outside of Jerusalem: bear the sin of the entire world in our place. In the great tradition of Israel's kings, Jesus was anointed – chosen – to save God's people. But unlike Israel's past kings, this Jesus saves us by taking our place. He becomes the one without a place in the kingdom that has been, in order to make a place for us in his new kingdom, the one that never fades away. And from his throne, he anoints us with his sacrificial love. He pours out his life that we might live.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Kissed by Peace*

In the woman in our story, we see what true faithfulness looks like. The Pharisee was wrong. We were wrong. She is not trying to win Jesus' favor. She has been anointed by his love and has thereby received his peace. Obviously faith has been born in her. It is because of her faith that she dares to walk into a room full of critics and approach Christ, sinner though she is. It is as if she already believes her sin has been cleansed by him. Who better to teach by example in this new kingdom that Christ has established? Of course it breaks every protocol the Pharisee is used to. Of course we would never take kindly to someone like this teaching us in our church. But such a one who has been anointed by the love of Christ will teach us anyway, just by acting on her faith. She has the peace of Christ to sustain her.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Washing Feet*

And that peace she has is bound to rub off on some of us. You see, she teaches by serving. She does not set out to teach, but her demonstration of gratitude for the love Christ has shown her becomes a teaching moment for us. Her methods will be unconventional, but her manner will be inviting. What she will teach us is not how to be more lawful or proper or knowledgeable about church doctrine, but rather how to receive the love of Christ and to be reborn in that love. If we can stand it, she will wash our feet, and rain tears of joy on us. And she will teach us by being the vessel through which we receive that love, as she washes our feet and anoints our head with oil. And we will be blessed because of her service – blessed to serve others in the same way. It is a whole new way of living, one that does not fear old protocols where fresh, good newness is abounding.