

**Homily, St. Andrew's  
Proper 11C, June 12, 2016  
Luke 7:36-8:3**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

There is an exercise about perspective that you may have encountered at some point in your life. It's a now-classic drawing depicting both an old witch with a big nose and the profile of a young lady with a pearl necklace. When it is shown as part of a group exercise, various people are asked to describe what they see, and inevitably, some are confused by a description that doesn't fit what they see at all. Many people are familiar with the drawing now, but when you first see it, it can be difficult to see the 'other' picture – the one that didn't first jump out at you. The point of the drawing and the exercise is to remind us about the power of perspective. The point is to realize that not everybody sees the same thing, even when they're looking at the same drawing.

Different perspectives play an important role in our Gospel story today. Like the picture of the old witch and the young lady, Jesus and Simon the Pharisee look at the woman in our story and see very different people. The Gospel passage begins by setting the scene: a Pharisee invites Jesus to have dinner at his house. During the dinner, a woman enters and stands behind Jesus, weeping so much that her tears bathe his feet. She lets down her hair and dries his feet with it and then kisses and anoints his feet with the ointment she had brought with her. All we know about this woman is that she is a sinner... she is unnamed and she doesn't speak and so other than the narrator's descriptions of her as a sinner, what we know of her, we know through her actions: She crashes a dinner party and weeps behind Jesus; and, she washes, kisses and anoints Jesus' feet with an ointment she brought with her.

With the scene set, we hear the perspective of the host, Simon the Pharisee. He looks at the woman and sees only a sinner who is disrupting his dinner party. It seems that she is the kind of woman that respectable people, such as himself and his invited guests, do not or should not, associate with. He doesn't speak his thoughts aloud, but to himself he makes a judgement about what the scene says about his invited guest, Jesus: "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." Simon's judgement of the woman is so quick and decisive that he doesn't seem to even see her actions... or perhaps her actions simply don't matter to him. His concern is in determining something about this man, Jesus. Jesus should see what Simon sees and should be responding to the situation differently.

The story then shifts to Jesus, who speaks to Simon with a riddle: "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?" We don't need to fuss about just how much money Jesus is talking about for the point is clear – one owes ten times more than the other. The answer to the riddle seems clear and indeed, Simon responds correctly: "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt." And Jesus affirms his right judgement... his correct answer.

Then Jesus connects his riddle with the scene they find themselves in, and expresses a different perspective than the one Simon thought to himself. Jesus turns to the woman but speaks 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.” It’s a mouthful. We can’t know what Simon expected when Jesus first asked to speak but it’s hard to imagine that he expected what he got. Jesus’ perspective includes that of Simon... Jesus sees the woman’s sins. The difference is that Jesus doesn’t name her “a sinner.” Jesus sees more than her reputation. Jesus sees her actions, past and present. Jesus sees her sins and judges her forgiven.

This is a story about gratitude, forgiveness and love, though not necessarily in that order. It is beautiful and gracious. But there is also more to it, for in his speech to Simon, Jesus indicates that he also sees him. Jesus sees more than his reputation. Jesus sees Simon’s action and inaction. For each of the woman’s actions, Jesus points out Simon’s inaction: he didn’t provide water for Jesus’ feet while she bathed his feet with tears; he didn’t offer a greeting kiss while she kisses his feet; he didn’t anoint Jesus’ head while she anoints his feet. Simon’s hospitality seems to have stopped with the dinner invitation. He is a Pharisee with resources enough to host a dinner party. Maybe he felt that was enough - we don’t know... what we do know is that he forgets the usual gestures of hospitality.

Simon isn’t a bad person. He is, presumably, a good person - perhaps a good and faithful Pharisee who is among those to whom little is forgiven because there is little to forgive. The challenge with being that person is that it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the content of one’s character outweighs and renders unimportant on-going positive action. The challenge is in thinking that one can rely on the past... past good deeds and right answers. If Simon IS good - if being good is his state of being, then nothing more is needed. Just like if the woman IS a sinner - if being sinful is her state of being, there’s nothing more to see. Instead, Jesus focuses on what is happening the present, in real time. It’s not that Jesus ignores the woman’s sins or Simon’s goodness, it’s just that he also sees what is going on right now. From that perspective, Jesus sees Simon’s lacklustre hospitality and the woman’s risky expressions of love in extravagant, radical hospitality, even when it wasn’t her place to offer it.

Our perspective on the story matters a great deal. With which character do you most closely identify? Are you like Simon? The weepy, sinful woman? Jesus? Who do you strive to be like? What does this choice, this identification, mean for your life? What could it mean? And what could it mean if you changed your perspective? What is the challenge and what is the grace in each character? Both the woman and Simon have good characteristics and both have failings. And trying to be like Jesus, considering “what would Jesus do?”, is a core part of our journey of faith. Our perspective matters and shifting our perspective can make all the difference.

After our time of worship today we will gather in a Special Meeting of Parishioners to consider a motion that declares a welcome and affirmation of people living in committed adult same-sex relationships and that expresses our desire to offer a pastoral response to such persons in the form of a Service of Blessing. This meeting can be a challenge because it calls to hear and consider different perspectives. We come with different cultural backgrounds from both within

and beyond Canada; we come with different approaches to reading the Bible and applying what we hear in its pages; we come with different experiences of and with gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and questioning people; we come placing different value on various sources of authority. We come with all kinds of differences and yet we all come from a perspective of faith and commitment to Christ. We are all seeking to be faithful as best as we can. And no matter what happens, that is what unites us.

The good news is that to guide our conversation and our decision today we have a Gospel story about gratitude, forgiveness and love, though not necessarily in that order. Jesus tells Simon that the woman's sins, "which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love." Jesus suggests that this weepy woman did what she did for Jesus - that she showed great love - because she somehow already knew that her sins were forgiven. And yet in the very next moment, Jesus turns and for the first time, addresses the woman directly, saying: "Your sins are forgiven." He ignores the buzz of budding controversy at his gall to speak for God and instead concludes the encounter by declaring to the woman: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." It is a strange mixture of gratitude and grace; forgiveness, faith and love... It is a mysterious chicken and egg conundrum... did the woman's acts of gratitude and love win her forgiveness or did she have some mysterious foreknowledge of Jesus' forgiveness that caused her to act? Who knows? What we do know is that she had the courage of faith and it is beautiful. It is good news.

As we seek to follow Jesus' way of life, may we discover a different perspective from what we see at first glance. May we offer one another radical and costly hospitality, even as we see each other's sinfulness and righteousness. May we know faith and forgiveness, grace and gratitude today as we deepen our relationships in this community of Christ.