

**Proper 6 - 3 Pentecost – Year C – June 13, 2010**  
**1 Kings 21:1-21a; Psalm 5:1-8; Galatians 2:15-21; Luke 7:36-8:3**  
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There once was a young man who lived in India. He is the water bearer to a grand household and daily carries two large pots the river, fills them, and carries them back to the house. Each pot hangs on the end of a pole that the young man carries across his shoulders. One of the pots has a crack in it, and the other pot is perfect and always delivers a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the river. Since the other pot has a crack in it, by the time the water bearer returns to the house each day it is only half full. This daily ritual continues for a year, and the water bearer delivers one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. The poor cracked water pot is ashamed of its own imperfection – its brokenness. The pot is miserable that it cannot accomplish what it is made to do. The other pot feels no sympathy for the cracked water pot, but is proud to deliver a full load of water every day.

In our Gospel story, we hear about Simon, who is described as a Pharisee. From Luke's description, we know that Simon is one who is particularly zealous for matters of purity, a whole slew of religious observances that largely amount to striving for religious one-up-manship. As a Pharisee, Simon is also highly cognizant of social and religious boundaries. What we would recognize as the kind of social and economic fences that separate the have's from the have not's, or desirable company from those we would rather not welcome into our home. Simon has invited Jesus to dinner, probably with several other guests from the community. This type of table fellowship with a guest of honor, such as Jesus, named by Simon in the passage as "Teacher", was often followed by a lively theological debate. Simon is also clearly curious about Jesus' teachings and ministry, and determining whether He really is a prophet or not. As the host, Simon has certain responsibilities, which he does not seem to be aware of neglecting until Jesus stands his lack of hospitality in stark contrast with the extravagance of an unnamed woman.

It is a fact of life that our worldly social status can blind us to what is, in truth, our total dependence on God, and God's grace. Simon is well regarded and honored by most in his community. On the other hand, the unnamed woman bears some kind of shame and social stigma that is just as well known around the city. She is described as a sinner, although her sins are not specified. She may have heard Jesus teaching in the synagogue or seen Him healing the widow's son. Her actions speak volumes about what she already knows and feels in her heart. She is not ashamed to come close to Jesus, to touch Him, to wash His feet with her tears, wipe them dry with her hair, kiss His feet, and anoint them with an expensive jar of ointment. Even before Jesus says anything to her, her actions alone tell us that she knows she is forgiven for her sins, and is overflowing with gratitude and love for God in Christ Jesus. Perhaps Simon is struck speechless at the woman's audacity, but her very presence should have elicited a response from Simon as the host. Just as it is the host's responsibility to provide water and a towel to wash the dust from the guests' feet, and oil to anoint their heads, it was Simon's responsibility to protect the honor of his guests. In that respect, this woman's scandalous presence and touch violate the laws of purity that Simon holds in such high regard. Her unfurled hair and unseemly behavior crosses all the boundaries of public decency, and yet Simon says and does nothing to protect Jesus, as his honored guest, from this woman. Essentially, Simon seems to want the woman to make a fool of Jesus, while he silently judges her a sinner, and concludes that Jesus is a false prophet. Simon is about to be invited out of his smug complacency.

In the words of the modern mystic, Evelyn Underhill: "*All Christians are called to grow and called to the spiritual life, ... in the way ordained of God. To fulfill [God's] purposes, we need only [what God] has given and three graces...courage, generosity, and patience – all consisting in giving and enduring.*" Not being the kind of man to allow a teachable moment to slip by, Jesus now speaks. He has

some devastating home truths for Simon. As usual, Jesus meets us precisely where we are. In Simon's case, he chooses an example directly from the cultural milieu and social status that Simon enjoys. Jesus speaks of a creditor who releases two debtors from their respective obligations. Relatively speaking one debtor owes a lot and the other much less, yet neither of them is able to pay. Jesus then asks Simon, "Now which of them will love him more?" Love, of course, is a relational word. The kind of hospitality that Simon has extended to Jesus is part of a highly relational system of patronage, which has little to do with love, and a lot to do with giving in order to receive. Jesus extends His analogy to demonstrate the relationship between God and sinners. God graciously and gratuitously forgives. God releases us from our sins through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. The only appropriate response is love, because there is nothing we can do to earn forgiveness. For Luke, love is not an emotional response, it is a verb.

What a turnaround for Simon, the most ungracious host, to discover that the woman he has judged a sinner is actually a living embodiment of faith in action. By asking Simon if he even sees the woman – really sees her – not just superficially, but sees her for who she is in her lavish hospitality towards Jesus, He invites Simon to reconsider the meaning of the woman's actions. Her expression of love is not superficial in any way. Her love flows from her newfound freedom in the release from her sins, through God's grace and forgiveness, and her healing through faith in Christ. Jesus is offering Simon, and all of us, the opportunity to realize our deepest capacity for love and gratitude as expressed in and through our relationship with Jesus. The depth of our own loving response to God in Christ is intimately connected to our own ability to graciously receive divine love and forgiveness. It is the complete opposite of the fence that Simon has put up around his heart.

The cracked pot is full of sorrow over its imperfection. Finally, one day by the stream, it speaks to the water bearer. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asks the young man, "What are you ashamed of?"

"For this past year, I have delivered only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to the master's house," the pot says.

The water bearer replies, "Today, as we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they come up the hill, the cracked pot notices the beautiful wild flowers on one side of the path reaching their colorful heads eagerly towards the sun. The bearer says to the pot, "I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you water them for me. All year I have picked beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. I know you are not perfect, but you still have the means to bring beauty to grace the master's house."

In this season of growth, you and I are invited to look at our own pride and judgments, as well as how God is offering forgiveness and healing in our brokenness. You and I are offered the gift of courage, to set down our pride, and to see God's grace at work in the world around us. As a community, we are blessed to be able to offer our gifts of generosity and hospitality, renewing our commitment to share our God-given resources. In the gift of patience, we have the evidence of God's transforming grace unfolding in our lives. Growing in Christ is one of our own gifts of hospitality in love and gratitude for all that He has done for us. God will show us how he uses us to water His seeds along the way, blooming in great beauty as we let God's love flow freely through us, in gratitude and praise.

Amen.