

Luke 7:36-50: Transformed relationships at Simon's dinner-party

The relationship of Jesus and Simon

Simon's mixed signals about his relationship with Jesus

- Simon invites Jesus to dine.
- Assumes Jesus would be a prophet.
- Calls Jesus "teacher."

yet, as we will learn

- Simon has not performed the rites of hospitality. Societies have formal rules of hospitality. Entrance pleasantries in our society: welcome at door, invite in, offer to take coat, inviting to sit down, offer something to drink.

What is behind Simon's actions?

- Likely, Simon sees something in Jesus, but feels awkward about friends and fellow Pharisees seeing him with Jesus or is uncertain how to treat Jesus who is both outsider and guest.
- Having Jesus in the context of a dinner party breaks a boundary.

Simon, Jesus and us

To what extent are we ambivalent about inviting Jesus, being seen with Jesus? That is, being identified not merely as church-member, but as follower of Jesus? We know how to function in the normal dinner-party contexts of our lives, perhaps we also know how to function when alone with God, but not with God in our normal lives.

The relationship of the woman, the Pharisee, and the dinner party

The woman

- The house door is open, visitors (of equal rank) are expected, but her coming in is a disruption.
- She is likely a prostitute, the flask of perfume she would have used to increase her attractiveness.
- Her actions strongly suggest that she had a previous meeting with Jesus.

The woman and the party

- Feet are unclean, and dealing with another's feet is subservient
Servants wash feet
Exodus 3:5: "remove the sandals from your feet, for the place ... is holy ground."
Psalm 60:8: "on Edom I hurl my shoe"
Psalm 110:1 "make your enemies your footstool"
- Her letting down her hair is provocative, perhaps seen by male guests as erotic.
- Her actions create tension among the guests who are both male, and of solid religious standing. (But what of the tension that should exist because Jesus was not extended hospitality? Or the tension of simply having Jesus there?)

Simon and the party

- As host, he must resolve socially awkward situations.
- Her presence violates the separation that decent people are to maintain from sinful activities.
- As the situation goes on, Simon's view of Jesus is changing. Simon expects prophetic behavior from Jesus, but does not recognize Jesus' behavior as the prophetic message.

The woman, the Pharisee, the dinner party, and us

Where do we locate ourselves here: as embarrassed or offended host, thinking of what to do? As embarrassed or offended guest, watching, perhaps with glee anticipating the coming fracas? We had our

own mixed motives for being at the party, those aims and hopes are going to be frustrated by this drama taking over.

Relationships of debt, obligation, favors and forgiveness

- As a man financially able to hold parties, Simon lives in a network of debts and obligations. The party is not only entertainment, but also a way of making debtors of those attending.
- Debt - sin - similar words in Aramaic.
- A count of debts and favors incurred, held and repaid form the context of patronage relationships.
- Canceling debts causes disruption in relationships because it removes the rankings of status that shape the relationship.

Jesus begins to critique relationships of debt.

- expresses no difficulty with the woman's actions. His actions of quietly accepting her actions are prophetic.
- sensing Simon's awkwardness, seeks to teach him.
- calling Simon by name, not by category.
- Simon is open to philosophical discussion as would be appropriate at a dinner-party symposium. But such discussion is to be one step removed from action.

Relationships of debt and forgiveness, and us.

We network for relationships that are friendships as they become profitable to us. We have to judge the liability of being friends with needy, poor, awkward or others whose association with us may cost us as we look up the hierarchy. This doesn't prohibit genuine affection and concern, but there is a cost to friendships where one imposes too many debts on us (by asking for things they need) or obligations on us (by giving us too many things).

Jesus' transformation of relationships with the woman and Simon

Jesus has forgiven the woman much, has he also forgiven Simon a little?

Jesus' presence and the parable he tells can imply a previous encounter of Jesus and Simon.

- Forgiving the woman much set her free for her to radically transformed her relationship. She is living her new life based on the old. She uses the jar ,using her hair - props of the old life, now transformed into means of praise.
- Forgiving Simon a little has only transformed his relationship a little. He is living some of the new life, but held by the old. He uses the dinner party - an integral part of old life - for a new thing by inviting Jesus to dine, but can't escape old notions of obligations creating status. He also cannot escape the old image of the woman, or the old idea that separations between sinner and holy people are permanent.

Jesus' transformation of relationships with the woman and Simon and us.

Forgiving and being forgiven are a new currency of exchange in relationships among us. Forgiveness opens up a power to change. This is contrasted with the assumption that punishment and discipline leads to change.

The relationship of the transformed sinner to the community

- Since she has (likely) already been forgiven, Jesus' statement is as much proclamation to the community as to her.

- Community does not want to accept good news. Accepting her into polite society is a disruption. The separation of good people from bad becomes smugness of good against bad.
- Other examples of forgiveness and restoration to community: Mark 5:25-34: woman with hemorrhage.

Our relationship to a transformed community.

What does it reveal about us that when we resent the good news that someone else has put their life back on track? To accept this good news means letting go of our outranking someone else. No longer can we put them down, if they are readmitted to the community.