

## LUKE – CHAPTER 7

### PRAY

Spend a few moments together in prayer asking that you would be open to God's voice speaking through his Word today.

### READ

Take time to read through Luke chapter 7

### EXAMINE

In this chapter we see beautiful encounters between Jesus and the “unexpected.” Luke frequently emphasizes those who are on the margins of the faith throughout his account of the gospel and brings them to the centre of our attention. The faith of the Centurion is praised over the faith of Israel (vs 9). A widow who has lost her only son, leaving her in a desperate situation for the rest of her life. Jesus raises him to life (without being asked, no less) and because his heart goes out to her (vs 13) he “gave him back to his mother” (vs 15). Imagine the impact of this upon the widow, the son, the disciples, and the crowd. Then we hear of John the Baptist, who by now is in prison (3:20), having a moment of doubt; “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (vs 19). Jesus responds with evidence that echoes his mission mandate from 4:18-19. What was promised then is being delivered now; “the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” Jesus doesn't answer John's question directly but rather places the evidence before him and allows him to make his own decision.

From this point today we focus our attention on one of the most amazing encounters in the whole gospel. A moment where a broken woman is restored *and* the powerful are confronted by their prejudices. Consider the situation. Jesus is invited to dinner at a Pharisees house. The dining table would have been a low to the ground with the guests reclining on the floor with their feet behind them (the positioning of Jesus' feet behind him will become significant in a moment). Simon has ignored normal social conventions and so treated Jesus with disrespect as a guest in his home. Imagine being invited to dinner and entering to find that the host had set themselves a place with fine china and the best crystal glasses. They are served a meal that could be offered at a Michelin star restaurant with the choicest of ingredients. You, on the other hand, are provided reheated leftovers from Tuesday night's meatloaf, served on paper plates (or worse, plastic!), and told to get water from the tap if you want a drink.



1. What message would you, as the guest, receive from your host in this situation?

You are not welcome, not good enough to have the best dinnerware, or the good food. The invitation to come to my house is enough of a privilege for you – you should be content in “your place.”

This slightly exaggerated analogy goes some way to describing the message that Simon the Pharisee is sending Jesus in this situation. He considers himself better than Jesus; higher in society, and the fact that Jesus even gets an invitation to the party should be enough of a privilege for him. It is arrogance personified. Simon has invited Jesus to “put him in his place” not to learn from him.

As the meal progresses a woman comes into the house. The coded description of her is enough for readers to know what kind of woman she is; she had “lived a sinful life.” She comes behind Jesus, at his feet, and she is weeping; wetting Jesus’ feet with her tears. Why is she weeping? What has brought on the tears? Is it fear? Is she confronted with her own sinfulness? Is it something else? She wipes Jesus’ feet with her tears, kisses them, and pours perfume on them. This is a very intimate and personal encounter that pushes the social boundaries of what is acceptable behaviour between a man and a woman beyond breaking point.

Note the physical position of the woman in this situation. Look at the picture above and think about where she would be in comparison to the men in the room – behind Jesus’s back and out of view of the others. Out of sight, but not out of mind.

Simon mutters to himself. “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.” (vs 39).

2. What are we meant to read between the lines in Simon’s muttered complaint?

Being ‘touched’ by a ‘sinner’ would make Jesus unclean. Any true prophet would avoid even getting close to such a person.

Note, too, the way Simon categorises, and thus dehumanizes, this woman. She is a “Sinner.” No name. No attempt to get to know her. He just verbally distances himself from her in order to avoid making contact with her very deep, human need. This enables Simon to ignore her desperation (don’t forget she’s weeping); a move that comes from his pride-fueled arrogance. We know this behaviour as “othering.”

3. Where do you see such “othering” today?

Consider, for example, asylum seekers and the political rhetoric of “Stop the Boats.” No longer are they spoken of as people but as boats that need stopping. Another example is the call to “Ban the Burqa.” Again, the human aspect is removed and the focus is put upon the article of religious clothing. This form of “othering” is layered with issues of race, gender, and religion and is very dangerous in its consequences.

4. Jesus responds by telling a story. Re-read that now (vs 41-43). What stands out in this story?

Jesus' question is particularly important at this point. "Which of them will *love* him more?" This goes beyond gratitude for a debt forgiven, to an intense, and very human, emotion. This question begins the process of confronting Simon's "othering" with a very real human need.

Try and visualize Jesus' physical movement as Luke describes it – he "turned towards the woman" and asks Simon "Do you see this woman?" Jesus moves to open up Simon's line of sight so that the woman is visible to him and, to drive the point home, makes him look at her directly – "Do you see *this* woman?" With the scathing rebuke that follows Jesus compares Simon's lack of respect with her emotion-filled acts of love towards Jesus. In doing so he "re-humanises" this "Sinner" *and* confronts the abuse of power at the same time. She is brought out into the open, revealed to be a human deserving of God's love, forgiven of her sins, and then dismissed in peace. In this moment a "sinner" is "saved" by Jesus (vs 50).

## REFLECT

1. Consider who you are in this story. Are you a "Simon" or a "Sinner"?
2. What people need to be "seen" and "re-humanised" in our time?
3. Think of someone who you know confronts injustice in this world. What is it that they do to do this and how are people given dignity and humanity as a result?

## IMAGINE

1. List three things that have really stood out from this passage.
2. Without worrying about any restrictions, what would the church look like if those things were always present? You might like to consider this from a global or local perspective (or both).

## PERFORM

1. What action can you take today (taking account of real world restrictions) that is a step towards that dream becoming a reality?

## PRAY

Spend time in prayer for each other, particularly for the actions you've committed to.

*For next week....*

1. Long Slow Read (LSR). Read chapter 8 slowly over the course of week. You can do this as many times as you like.
2. Tempo Read – Read and reread Chapter 8 several times. Take note of verses/phrases/characters that stand out – e.g. Jesus, Holy Spirit, poor, women.
3. Repeats – Choose one verse to memorise. Repeat it many times throughout the day and over the course of a week or so. Meditate on the verse and pray it in and out. Repeat the verse many times throughout your day.