

**First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Lenten Luncheon
Tuesday, March 15, 2011**

Welcome and Thanks to Women's Circle 1 for the Luncheon

Unison Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you for bringing us again to the beginning of another Season of Lent, and another opportunity to reflect on what the death of Jesus upon the cross means in each of our lives. As we remember the words and the actions of some of those who participated in some way in his death, or who witnessed his suffering or death on the cross, so we pray that you will help us to use this Season of Lent to see again how our words and our actions often reflect theirs. Grant us, we pray, the courage to use this season of the year to examine our own lives in these ways in the assurance of love and the grace which you have shown for us, and for the whole world, in the life, the suffering, the death on the cross, the burial in the tomb, and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son, for it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Opening Hymn No. 7

"The Solid Rock"

Stanzas 1 and 2

Jesus Visits the Home of Simon the Pharisee

Luke 7:36-50

Leader:

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. 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. 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. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it he said to himself,

People:

"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."

Leader: Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

People: "Teacher, speak."

Leader:

A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred silver pieces, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?"

People: "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt."

Leader:

"You have judged rightly." 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. 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." Then Jesus said to the woman,

People: "Your sins are forgiven."

Leader:

But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But Jesus said to the woman,

People: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Simon Reflects on the Visit of Jesus to His House

I really could not figure him out. This Jesus kept talking about God and claiming to be religious, yet all the time he seemed too critical of people like myself. Did he not know that we are the religious right? We are the defenders of God among our nation. If it was not for faithful Pharisees like myself the whole nation would be sold-out to Rome and all that our law, traditions and our family values stand for would have been lost forever. Yet he kept calling us hypocrites, who loved to make a show but were like white washed tombs, looking good on the outside but on the inside full of all kinds of decay. I had had about as much as I could stand. Even more I knew that if he kept talking like this he was heading for trouble from some of my colleagues, especially those with the real power in Jerusalem. So for his own good I decided to invite him to dinner at my house. I thought that maybe over a meal he would be a little more relaxed, and I could set him straight on a few things and just maybe I could help him to see the direction in which he was heading if he kept talking as he did.

I was pleased that he accepted my invitation. Maybe as much wandering around as he was doing he was just glad to get a decent meal. All was going well and I was about ready to lay into him and tell him what I thought about him when everything just fell apart.

It was bad enough that a woman would have the audacity to enter this meal of men except as to serve us as women were supposed to do. But when I saw who it was I was horrified. How dare such a woman with her character and questionable reputation around our town even enter my house, and especially to intrude on our meal and our deep conversations.

If her presence there was not enough, what happened next was just too much for me to take as she had the audacity to stand behind Jesus and to proceed to wash his feet with her tears, to dry them with her hair and then to anoint them with the expensive perfume which she had brought with her that she must have received as gift from one of her male customers. I was absolutely horrified. What I was seeing just made it very clear to me that whatever he claimed this Jesus could be no religious person and no prophet because if he was he certainly would not have allowed a woman like her to touch him.

Before I could say anything, though, or call my servants to have this woman thrown out of my house, he spoke to me. It was as if he could read my mind and everything that I had been thinking in this terrible and most embarrassing of situations. Naturally I wanted to hear what he had to say about this atrocious situation that had arisen in my house over which I seemed to have no control.

I had heard that this Jesus had a reputation for being quite a story teller, but when he started to spin that yarn I had no idea where he was going. It certainly did not seem to apply to this terrible

woman who had messed up everything for me tonight.

He said that there was a man who had two people who owed him money. One owed five hundred silver pieces, and the other fifty. But that when they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. I did not quite see the point of his story until he asked me, "Now which of these people will love him more?"

Well the answer seemed quite obvious, so though I still did not see what he was getting at, I shouted out, "'I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt."

He said that I had given the right answer but then what he had to say was really hard to take as he asked me to look at that terrible woman who was still touching him and anointing his feet. He said, "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 she 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."

How embarrassing that he had shown me my inadequacies as a host. I suppose I had treated him as I did because I really could not see him as an equal who needed to be treated like my fellow Pharisees. Maybe he was right I had treated him with a measure of contempt but as I said I was only trying to help him and to do those things that would be for his own good if only he would listen to me and stop condemning good, righteous, upright Pharisees like myself.

But as I listened to him and his words to that woman about sin and love and forgiveness I found that he was not simply judging me as a host but was calling my whole life into question.

I had invited this Jesus into my home in order that I could set him straight on a few things and just maybe help to protect him and save him getting into real trouble with some other people. True I had been judging him and all his claims to be from God. But now he is one who seems to be judging me as if he was God. All my life I had tried to be faithful to God and to show my love for God by my faithful obedience to God's laws, but now this Jesus seemed to imply that this terrible woman has a greater love for God than I have. What he was saying seemed so preposterous. Could he be implying that in order to love God more, I needed to know God's forgiveness more, and therefore like this woman I should sin more? I just could not believe that. Or was he suggesting that in my pride at my faithful obedience to the law I was somehow not open to receive the love God was wanting to show to me? Is it possible that I was trying so hard to be good in God's sight that I was leaving no place in my life for a God who wants to show how much he loves me by being willing to forgive me when I fail? Was it possible that in my pride at the way in which I felt superior to other people, especially to this terrible woman, I was somehow harboring in my life the sin of pride that was not just stopping me seeing anything good in such a woman, but also cutting me off from appreciating what it

means to be loved by God?

As I said, I invited this Jesus to my house to set him straight on a few things and to help to protect his life. When he left I was glad that he at least took that terrible woman with him but I found that I was not so certain about him or about myself as I had been. Instead of setting him straight I found that he had left me with more questions about God and about myself. Was he truly a prophet come from God? Was what he was saying about God being willing to love and forgive someone like that woman really true? What did it mean when he seemed to think he had the authority to forgive her sins?

I guess the main word of advice I can give to you is if you do not want your whole life, and all of those things of which you are proud, to be brought into question do not plan to invite this Jesus into your house or into your life. He will cause you to think about what it really means to love and to be loved, to accept and to be accepted, to forgive and to be forgiven.

One thing about which I am sure is that this Jesus certainly seemed to look at this woman with eyes that were very different than I had ever looked at her. He seemed to recognize her as someone who needed love and acceptance and forgiveness whereas I saw her only as someone to be judged and condemned for what she had done and was doing. I wonder what it would take for me to start to look at her and at other people with the eyes of Jesus. Indeed I would like to invite you out of my experience to think of someone whom you would look at in a very different way if you looked at him or her with the eyes of Jesus rather than as you generally look at him or her. Pause for a moment and think about such a person in your life.

(part of these reflections were based on First Person Portrayals by Carl B. Rife, 1972, C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., Lima, Ohio)

Moving away from speaking as Simon the Pharisee I would like to invite you to take just one minute and to pray for the person about whom you have thought as if you were looking at him or at her with the eyes of Jesus.

As we begin this Season of Lent I would like to challenge each of us during this week to spend just one minute a day praying for that person as if we were looking at him or her with the eyes of Jesus.

For our closing prayer I would invite you to turn to page 43 and to the hymn, "Help Us Accept Each Other." This is one of ten hymns of the Rev. Fred Kaan, in our Presbyterian Hymnal. Fred Kaan was born in 1929 in Holland but lived most of his life in England or working in Geneva for the World Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, and died in October 2009. This particular

hymn is really a prayer and since it may not be so well-known as a hymn I would like to invite us to read it as a prayer before Larry plays the music and we sing stanzas 1 and 2. As we pray this prayer together I would invite

Stanza One: All

Help Us Accept Each Other as Christ accepted us;
Teach us as sister, brother, Each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord, among us and bring us to believe
We are ourselves accepted, and meant to love and live.

Stanza Two: Women

Teach us, O Lord, Your lessons, as in our daily life
We struggle to be human, and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people for all, not just for some,
To love them as we find them, or as they may become.

Stanza Three: Men

Let Your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved
In living situations to do the truth in love;
To practice Your acceptance until we know by heart
The table of forgiveness, and laughter's healing art.

Stanza Four: All

Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need,
Who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,
We need new eyes for seeing; New hands for holding on:
Renew us with Your Spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!

Closing Hymn No. 43

"Help Us Accept Each Other"

Stanzas 1 and 2

The Charge and Benediction from the Rev. Dr. Richard C. Halverson, Presbyterian Pastor and former Chaplain to the United States Senate:

Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are God has a purpose for your being there. Christ, who dwells in you has something he wants to do through you where you are! Believe it, and go in his grace and peace. Amen.