

May what is spoken here and what is heard be spoken and heard in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You may not believe it, but your Interim Pastor is an introvert. It's not that I don't like being around folks; I certainly do. But, as an introvert, one of my worst nightmares is to show up at some event, not know a soul, and be ignored by everyone.

Now I don't know whether Jesus was an introvert; I'll leave that to smarter minds than mine. But probably because I am an introvert, and am, as a result, probably hyper-sensitive to what Jesus must have felt – as we heard in today's Gospel reading - when he walked into the little soiree that the Pharisee was having. The Pharisee, presumably a reputable and respected fellow, had asked Jesus to eat with him. That much we're told, so Jesus didn't show up uninvited.

But beyond that, there's absolutely no evidence whatever of hospitality on the part of the host toward Jesus. All we're told is that Jesus 'took his place at the table'. As far as we can determine, nobody welcomed him, nobody offered him a drink, and nobody (as apparently was the custom back then) arranged to wash his feet.

Now, I would be the first to acknowledge that social customs were different back then, so it's hard for us to 'translate' across the centuries exactly what happened. Even so, it's not hard to imagine that Jesus – (whether or not he was an introvert) and who was, after all, an invited guest – must have felt awkward – at the very least – in the course of this less-than-gracious-welcome.

And then, in the midst of this rather strange circumstance something even stranger happened. In walked a woman, who was described – not by name – but as 'a woman in the city, who was a sinner'. I can guess what she did for a living; I bet you can too. And I'd bet a week's salary that she wasn't an invited guest at the Pharisee's little dinner party.

But – invited or not, and despite her not-so-stellar reputation - what that woman did for Jesus was gracious and welcoming, as well as extravagantly tender and caring, especially in contrast to the greeting of the Pharisee. But the Pharisee, instead of feeling embarrassed at being 'shown up' by this woman of ill-repute, began to question not the presence of the woman, but the credentials of Jesus. Surely, thought the Pharisee, if this Jesus were really a prophet, he'd know who this woman was.

Well, of course Jesus knew who she was. And she was a sinner. So, too, however, was the Pharisee, if for nothing other than his coldness of heart. And so, of course, are we, some two thousand years later, sinners - each in our own ways. And Jesus knows that, too.

But ultimately, the point – at least of this story is not the fact of nor the depth of our sin, but the reality of and the depth God's forgiveness. And the more we appreciate the depth of that forgiveness, the more likely we are to respond as that woman did: with lavish attention and affection. And that, apparently, is just what Jesus want us to do and hopes that we'll do – bestow lavish attention and affection because we sinners have been forgiven.

That's not to say that God doesn't take seriously the fact and the depth of our sin. God does judge us. Nor is it to suggest once forgiven we never ever sin again. After all, we don't know what happened next to the woman in today's Gospel story. There's no evidence or guarantee that she wouldn't – or didn't – go right back out into the street. And when we do backslide, God does judge us.

But God's judgment is part and parcel of God's grace, part of God's deep yearning for us. If God didn't care, God wouldn't bother with us at all. If God didn't care, God wouldn't have bothered to send Jesus to us or to let him die for us. God could simply have let us all go – eternally. Fortunately, that option has nothing whatever to do with love - nothing to do with forgiveness.

And Jesus has offered forgiveness. Jesus offered forgiveness to the woman who washed his feet, to the Pharisees who rejected him, to the apostles who failed him, and to those who nailed him to the tree. Jesus also offers forgiveness to the likes of you and me.

And we, who have been claimed as Christ's own in baptism, are called to the same measure of charity and love. So we have a job to do. We have the job of welcoming other forgiven sinners into our midst – here in Old Lyme, or wherever we may be. And we have the job of treating all of God's beloved children with lavish and tender care.

Let me close by quoting a rather outrageous statement by George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Outrageous it may be, but surely it is also right on. "There is no way," he writes, "of belonging to Jesus Christ except by belonging gladly and irrevocably to the glorious ragbag of saints and fat-heads who make up the One, Holy, and Catholic Church. "Fellow saints," he concludes, "we have a big job to do".

We do have a big job to do. We also have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to help us do that big job. Amen.

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