

Proper 6C (Pentecost 3), 2010

Text: Luke 7:36-8:3

Title: Dangerous Dining

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It's a dangerous thing to dine with Jesus.

Before we eat, we pray, "Come Lord Jesus." What if He actually did? What if Jesus showed up at your house for dinner? Would you be ready? What would happen?

You might be surprised to hear that a Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner. In fact Luke tells of three separate occasions when a Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner (11:37, 14:1).

The Pharisees were still trying to figure Jesus out. He didn't fit their expectations. On the one hand he seemed much like a prophet- he spoke with authority, he performed miracles. On the other hand he ignored some of the most obvious and important traditions- he didn't keep the Sabbath as they expected, he associated with the wrong crowd, he even claimed to have the authority to forgive sins. Simon the Pharisee was probably curious to hear what this provocative young Rabbi had to say.

And so he planned a dinner party. Simon would play the host. He was in control of all the details of the evening (or so he thought). He prepared the guest list, sent out the invitations, planned the meal, everything down to the centerpieces.

Everything was going according to plan. The guests had arrived, everyone was reclining at the table, and they were about to start the meal, when **she** came in, uninvited.

Not her; not tonight.

Everyone knew her. It was a small town and rumors spread quickly. Simon had seen her out on the street corner. He saw the men who came in and out of her house at all hours of the day and night. It was clear what sort of a person she was. You didn't have to be a genius to put two and two together.

Simon had done his best to avoid her. When he saw her in town he would avoid eye contact and even pass by on the other side of the road. He couldn't imagine speaking with her, let alone having her in his house.

But somehow she found her way into his house on this special night. How embarrassing! Surely Simon was mortified to see her crash his party.

Before he could politely show her to the door, maybe give her a few morsels of food to keep her quiet, she's flung herself at Jesus' feet.

She's a complete wreck. It's not pretty.

First of all, she's crying. Not just a few tears trickling down her cheeks, no, she's sobbing uncontrollably. Her whole body is shaking as her tears stream in torrents from her face. Her flood of tears actually wash the feet of Jesus clean.

Then there's her hair. A woman's hair was her glory. No respectable woman would be caught dead with her hair down in public. And yet she was reckless enough not only to let down her hair, but to use it to wipe Jesus' feet.

Finally there's the perfume. It was the good stuff, probably very expensive, but where do you think the money came from?

This woman clearly has no shame, no sense of propriety, no self-respect. She doesn't belong here, does she?

Jesus seems to be a magnet for sinners and the unclean. He attracts the tax collectors and prostitutes and the lame and demon possessed and the lepers and the blind and the dying. (Come back next week to hear about the naked demoniac who lives in a cemetery!)

Not only that, sometimes Jesus even seems to deliberately search these people out.

It's dangerous to dine with Jesus because you never know who will show up. It could be a notorious sinner like this woman.

Simon thought he could meet with Jesus on his own terms- have a few drinks, relax and shoot the breeze, introduce him to his friends, maybe get some answers about what he was up to, find out- is he one of us? Simon didn't think he needed Jesus for anything- and it shows in how he treats Jesus- no water for his feet, no oil for his head, no kiss of greeting. The woman, on the other hand, cannot do enough to show her love for Jesus.

Is Jesus someone you find interesting and intriguing? Someone who makes you think and is fun to have around?

For many, Jesus never gets beyond the stage of conversation partner. He'd make an interesting dinner guest, maybe even a good casual acquaintance or friend (if he'd only pay more attention to how he was expected to act).

If that's you, you might want to think twice about dining with Jesus. You never know who else is going to show up. You never know who's going to kneel next to you at his table.

The Lord brings all sorts of people into his church, and gathers them around his table.

Jesus dined with Pharisees and He dined with sinners. He knows the hearts of everyone. Whether you're good at hiding it, like David, or whether it's common knowledge, the

Lord knows all the sordid details. But he still dines with you and draws you into his service.

When the Lord gathers his church at his table, he gathers his whole church. When you kneel at this rail, you're dining with David, and with this woman, and with all the other sinners the Lord has made his own, even the sinners in this congregation, sinners like me, sinners like you.

Consider how much you have been forgiven. Jesus tells the story about someone who had been forgiven 500 denarii. Under Caesar Augustus, Roman soldiers were paid 225 denarii per year, so this is about two years' pay. If someone forgave such a debt to you—paid off your mortgage, or your car, or your student loans, I'm sure that you'd be overwhelmed with gratitude.

Can you put a price on your forgiveness? How much is your salvation worth? Believe it or not, the Lord did put a price on your salvation. He has purchased and won you, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. Your debt has not only been forgiven, it has been paid in full in Jesus' blood.

This woman, who had been forgiven much, came to Simon's house that night out of love. She's not compelled by guilt. She's not trying to repay Jesus for what he's done. She's not trying to impress him with her humility. She just loves Jesus.

So Jesus says two things to her.

First: Your sins are forgiven. There is no need to extract a confession from the woman. Her tears are enough of a confession. She knows what she's done and it's tearing her to pieces.

David, on the other hand, needed to be brought to confession. He needed to hear the accusing words of Nathan to bring him to his knees. He knew he had sinned, but he was still trying to cover it up. When the enormity of his sin is made clear to him, he confesses his sin and hears the same words of forgiveness.

David needed the Law. This woman was ready for the Gospel.

Jesus speaks these same words to you, week after week in the Divine Service, and every time you come to Private Confession. As the pastor speaks those words, "I forgive you all your sins," it is Jesus' voice you hear. Dry your tears, for your sins are forgiven. You are blessed. You said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and he forgave the iniquity of your sin.

The second word Jesus speaks is "Your faith has saved you, go in peace." The woman received the forgiveness of the Lord. That's faith, and so now she has peace. Despite the dirty looks and whispers, the difficulties that were bound to continue, the woman now has

peace with God. She is no longer bound by her past mistakes, and now she stands as God's precious and beloved daughter.

Jesus speaks these same words to you in the Divine Service. After he feeds you with his body and his blood, he dismisses you with the words "Go in peace." As you arise and leave the Lord's Table, you leave completely forgiven. There is no separation between you and God, because God has given himself to you in this meal. You are incorporated into Christ and now have peace with the Father.

If you dine with Jesus as a Pharisee, trying to fit Jesus to your ideas and needs, then you are in danger of being uncomfortable, embarrassed, and ultimately missing the whole point.

If you dine with Jesus as a sinner, you are in danger as well. You are in danger of being forgiven and being changed. You are in danger of being loved in way you never could have imagined. You are in danger of being set free from your sins and having peace with God.