

June 5, 2016 Luke 7: 36-43

Most of us are old enough to know the old, old saying “*You are the pot calling the kettle black.*” Or “*Don’t judge a book by its cover.*”

And the up dated version, “*Don’t judge a book by its movie.*”

Judging is a strange thing and as these folk wisdoms suggest we do a lot more of it than is fair or helpful.

I am sure we have all felt unfairly or unkindly judged many times. So, if our own experience tells us there is too much judging going on, then why do we keep adding to it?

When was the last time any of us experienced judgment that made us feel really good?

And yet, I have to admit, that I can still hear myself sometimes thinking exactly what the dinner host was thinking in our gospel lesson.

“If this guy is as good as he thinks he is then he should know better?”

“If this person is the real deal then he/she should know how to keep better company or take better care, or whatever?” You get the drift.

As the story unfolds we see that this kind of self-righteous, judgmental thinking blinds the dinner host from recognizing the healing forgiveness available in a situation.

Friends, when we are being critical in this way we miss the grace of the moment.

We miss the opportunity of self-surpassing.

We miss the care and compassion, of intensified humanity.

We also miss out on the healing kindness of forgiveness that we ourselves need.

So the first thing we need to notice is that unnecessary judgments block us from the blessing of forgiveness, every time.

Now, according to scripture **Jesus** is a pro at reading body language, and facial expressions. He is the “*thin slicer*” par-excellence. He knows the kind of life the *uninvited and unwanted* woman has led and what is going on inside her amidst her tears. He refuses to be embarrassed or angry with her. Rather he welcomes and supports her. **Jesus** also knows what his host is thinking and resists judging or getting indignant with him. Instead **Jesus** decides to make this a teaching moment.

Jesus tells a story. “*Which of the two was more grateful?*” He asks. “*The one who was forgiven the most, of course!*” is the reply.

Now, I’m pretty certain, the dinner host doesn’t really get the full impact of what **Jesus** is talking about: For he too is one of the debtors in the story.

When was the last time we were not being closed minded, cranky or difficult while complaining about someone or something?

Unnecessary judgments prevent us from recognizing what **Jesus** knows, that we **all** are *already and always* forgiven by **God**. **Jesus** knows what is going on with the *uninvited and unwanted* woman and with the dinner host. He knows God has *already and always* forgiven each of them and so there is no need of further judgment in the situation.

So as followers of **Jesus**, when we sense an unnecessary judgment rising up within us, we just say to ourselves “*Oh, that is interesting...*” or “*Oh, that is why...*” or “*Oh, well, it is what it is...*” and leave it at that. Who are we to judge what **God** has already forgiven. With **Jesus** we let the rush to judgement pass and see the opportunity for extending **God’s** forgiveness.

Application for Today

To forgive is to set the prisoner free

and discover that the prisoner was us all along.

Luke 7: 44-50

I saw a wonderful movie the other night “**The Lady in the Van**” starring Maggie Smith. It is a dark comedy of sorts filled with lots of theological issues. After fleeing the scene of an accident, the central figure in the movie is driven to live in her van for *fear of being found out* by the police. With no fixed address she becomes a bag lady on wheels, *unwanted and uninvited* on the streets of a middle class community in the London suburbs.

We see how this fear of *being found out* keeps the *unwanted and uninvited woman* from the forgiveness and reconciliation she needs. Sadly she remains on the margins and cannot find her way home in this life. She remains ungrateful to her dying day.

In our gospel lesson the *uninvited and unwanted woman* overcomes her *fear of being found out* and comes to **Jesus** at the dinner party. Grateful for his openness and acceptance, she offers hospitality the only way she knows how. It is scandalous but **Jesus** calls it impressive.

I can see the closing moments of this scene in my mind’s eye: The self-righteous muttering, the frowns of judgement, the accusative glances all around the room. And yet, in the midst of this dark shadow of rejection, I see the light and peace of forgiveness flowing back and forth between **Jesus** and the *uninvited and unwanted woman*.

You see, her actions *participate* in her forgiveness. As **Jesus** indicates, a little loving kindness and tender mercy goes a long way; generates forgiveness for a mountain of sin! Her willingness to perform the most basic acts of hospitality neglected by the host unleashes an interaction

of forgiveness and healing. Kindness and caring when it comes to our need for forgiveness have a huge multiplier effect.

Isn't it amazing to realize that we live in a world where a little loving kindness or tender mercy can undo years of error or selfishness?

Isn't it amazing to have a loving **God** who offers us endless opportunities to rectify our errors, forgive our failures, and free us for the future?

The dinner guests however live in another reality. Their judging actions block them from the forgiving moment. Their self-righteous indignation blinds them to their own sin and need for forgiveness.

The key concept here is **participation**.

Do we **participate** with the dinner guests or do we **participate** with **Jesus** and the *uninvited and unwanted woman*?

Application for Today

With **Jesus** let's avoid making unnecessary judgements so we can **participate** in life renewing forgiveness:

Because, forgiveness is at the heart of **God** and our life together.

We can't live any other way.

Meditative Prayer of Forgiveness (Repeat 3X)

If I have harmed anyone in any way

either knowingly or unknowingly

through my own confusions

I ask their forgiveness.

If anyone has harmed me in any way

either knowingly or unknowingly

through their own confusions

I forgive them.

And if there is a situation

I am not yet ready to forgive

I remember God's forgiveness

and try to forgive again.

For all the ways that I harm myself,

negate, doubt, belittle myself,

judge or be unkind to myself

through my confusions

I remember God's forgiveness

and try to forgive myself again

and again until I do.