

# JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

Luke 7:36-50

Sunday, June 26, 2022

*Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor*

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The famous actress Audrey Hepburn was a stickler for good manners. She once invited a younger actress to a dinner party at her home but the young lady never appeared. She didn't even bother to offer an excuse or make an apology. She just didn't show up. Several days later Hepburn and the young lady met by chance at a museum. Embarrassed, the younger actress said, "Miss Hepburn, I believe I was invited to your house last Thursday evening for dinner." To which Hepburn responded coolly, "Yes, I believe I did invite you. Were you there?"

Well, if you are a stickler for good manners at dinner parties, you may not like the dinner Jesus attended in our text for today. Emily Post would have been mortified. In fact, when you read through the gospels it seems that some folks had an uncanny knack for losing their manners around Jesus.

It all started when a Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to his home for dinner. Jesus accepted the invitation and went to the party. But Simon seemed to forget his manners around Jesus. Back then, three forms of hospitality were standard for the guest of any home. First, the host would give his guest the kiss of peace. Second, cool water would be poured over the guest's feet to cleanse and comfort them from hard walking on dirt roads. And third, the guest's head was anointed with a pinch of sweet-smelling incense. When Jesus arrived at Simon's dinner party none of these things were done.

Now why? Who knows. It could be that the Pharisee had a hidden agenda. Don't forget that Jesus was very critical of the religious establishment. Maybe he had invited Jesus there to try to trap him with loaded questions over dinner. Perhaps Simon wanted to keep his distance from Jesus because he did not want to look guilty by association. After all, Jesus hung out with unsavory characters – tax collectors and sinners. Whatever the reason, Simon lost his manners around Jesus.

It is important to remember that at the time of Jesus people often dined in open courtyards. In those days,

houses of the privileged were built around an open courtyard. Hosts would often throw parties and banquets in their courtyards to show off their position in society. People on the street could smell the food and hear the laughter. They could also roam in and out of the courtyard and overhear theological discussions going on between Pharisees and rabbis during dinner.

On this particular night a woman from the street appeared. Everyone knew she was promiscuous. There were even rumors that she was a prostitute. She had followed Jesus to that dinner. She watched closely and noticed Simon's bad manners. She walked into the courtyard and all eyes were on her. The people around the table began to whisper to each other. When she saw Jesus reclining at Simon's table, she knelt behind him and began to cry. She then wet Jesus' feet with her tears. Next, she let down her hair, something no respectable woman did in public, and dried Jesus' feet with her hair. Finally, she kissed his feet and took the only valuable thing she had in her possession, her perfume, and poured it on Jesus' feet.

The people at the dinner party couldn't believe their eyes. Simon was terribly offended. He was shocked that Jesus would let this woman of the streets even touch him. But Jesus had different eyes. He saw the gesture as compassionate and beautiful. He affirmed her and forgave her sins.

Now, there are 200 sermons in this poignant text, and I don't have time to preach all of them today. But one of the most intriguing questions about this text is this: What was it about Jesus that compelled this woman to do what she did? In fact, the larger question is: What was it about Jesus that compelled the marginalized, like this woman, to flock to him?

After some reflection I believe I have an answer to these questions. And it is an answer we all need. Why did this woman do what she did? Because Jesus, like no other human being who ever walked the earth, could really see the broken hearted. Only

Jesus saw this woman's heart. Only he knew what she was really feeling. Only he knew what had brought her to that dinner party and compelled her to do what she did.

The hard truth is that most of the people in our lives are oblivious to the wounds that we carry around. Sometimes this is because we do a really good job of hiding our pain. But Jesus is the one person who sees beyond our veneer and finds the bruises and brokenness.

In his book, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, David Seamonds writes about the people he has worked with who have scars that nobody else can see. He compares them to the giant sequoia and redwood trees. Seamonds writes, "In most of the parks, the naturalists can show you a cross section of a great tree they have cut and point out that the rings of the tree reveal the developmental history, year by year. Here's a ring that represents a year when there was a terrible drought. Here are a couple of rings from years when there was too much rain. Here's where the tree was struck by lightning. Here are some normal years of growth. This ring shows a forest fire that almost destroyed the tree. Here's another of savage blight and disease. All of this lies embedded in the heart of the tree, representing the autobiography of its growth....And that's the way it is with us." Seamonds continues, "Just a few minutes beneath the protective bark, the concealing, protective mask, are the recorded rings of our lives.

"There are scars of ancient, painful hurts . . . as when a little boy rushed downstairs one Christmas dawn and discovered in his Christmas stocking a dirty old rock, put there to punish him for some trivial boyhood naughtiness. This scar has eaten away in him, causing all kinds of interpersonal difficulties.

"Here is the discoloration of a tragic stain that muddied all of life . . . as years ago behind the barn, or in the haystack, or out in the woods, a big brother took a little sister and molested her.

"And here we see the pressure of a painful, repressed memory . . . of running after an alcoholic father who was about to kill the mother, and then of rushing for the butcher knife. Such scars have been buried in pain for so long that they are causing hurt and rage that are inexplicable.

"In the rings of our thoughts and emotions, the record is there; the memories are recorded, and all are alive.

And they directly and deeply affect our concepts, our feelings, our relationships. They affect the way we look at life and God, at others and ourselves" (Victor Books, 11-12).

If we had the eyes of Jesus we would not be so quick to judge a person like the woman in our text. Who knows? Perhaps Jesus could see that she was abused as a child. Maybe Jesus could see that she was all alone in life. Perhaps Jesus could feel the weight of the emotional pain she was carrying around. Maybe this is why Jesus responded the way he did. Only he could see her heart, and she knew it. Only he could give her the healing love that she craved, and she knew it. Only he could accept her, and she knew it. The world had been so cruel to her. Men had used her. Life had been so hard on her. And then along came this teacher from Nazareth who showed her real love.

Life can be so cruel to the wounded. The world can be so hard to the beaten, broken and bruised. Perhaps this is how you feel today. Maybe you have come to worship today with wounds that have never healed and your soul is screaming out, "Does anyone care? Does anyone really see me? Does anyone understand? Does anyone love me?"

Fred Craddock once told a powerful parable: "One evening a farmer named John was heading for home. He was running late. He tried to take a short cut, cutting across an unfamiliar field. He fell into an old abandoned cistern... a deep, deep hole. He was a proud and strong man, so he said, 'I can get out of here.' But he was knee-deep in mud and sand. He reached to sides of the cistern, mossy green and slick and wet... and he had no leverage. He could not get out.

"Finally, he swallowed his pride and cried out: 'Help! Help!' A neighbor walking by heard his cry and looked down in there and said, 'John, is that you? I can't believe you are down there. Look at you down there in that ugly hole... an embarrassment to your family, an embarrassment to yourself. You are a disgrace!' And the neighbor really told him off. Then he went on into town and told everybody about it and how he told him off, and he said, 'I've been wanting to say that for years!' It was quite a speech, but John was still in the hole!

“John continued to cry out for help – more desperately now. Next, a couple of politicians came by and saw John’s plight... and they were upset. They said, ‘This is awful. This should have been taken care of years ago!’ So they went into town, got the city council together... and they passed a law and they came out and put up a sign: ‘Twenty-five dollar fine to fall in this hole.’ And it was a good law, they said. It needed to be passed, they said... but John was still in the hole.

“John cried out louder: ‘Help! Help! Help!’ Some people driving by heard his cries. They looked down into the hole and they said, ‘This is a disgrace to our community. We can’t have this.’ So they notified the Beautification Committee and they came out and planted some azaleas and dogwoods and yellow roses. It was beautiful... but John was still in the hole.

“Now with a raspy voice... and almost no hope left, John called out, ‘Please, somebody... help me! Help!’ Just about then, a man came by and he looked down there and saw John in this awful fix and he had compassion on him and he said, ‘Let me help you. I can get you out! Here... take hold of my hand!’ And in that moment the only thing important in John’s world was that hand!

“Do you know who that was? Do you know whose hand it was that pulled John out of that hole? Of course you do! Most of us recognize that hand and most of us remember how he pulled us up and out and saved us” (told by James Moore in “Love One Another”).

If you are in the pit today I want you to remember that hand. And I want you to remember that the world will tell you the 20 different ways that you have messed up, but the world won’t save you. The world will tell you what you should be doing right, but the world won’t save you. The world will criticize you and judge you, but the world won’t save you. Only Jesus Christ will save you. Only Jesus Christ will heal your broken heart. Only Jesus Christ will make you well.

Perhaps you are thinking, “Well, Charley, you don’t know the things that I have done. You don’t know how ashamed I am.” Well, God knows and as Corrie ten Boom said, “there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still.”

Robert Falconer once held a large Bible study in a homeless shelter. He read to them our text – the story of the woman who wiped Jesus’ feet with her tears. While he was reading he heard a loud cry and looked up and saw a young, thin girl whose face was disfigured by

smallpox. He sat beside her and encouraged her. After a few moments she asked, “Will he ever come again, the one who forgave the woman? I have heard that he will come again. Will it be soon?” Falconer told her that he would come back. She cried again. Then she said, “Sir, can’t he wait a little while? My hair ain’t long enough yet to wipe his feet” (Stephen Brown, *When Being Good Is Not Good Enough*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).

Jesus understands why you feel what you feel and how you got to this point in your life. More than that, Jesus loves you and can heal your broken heart. Come to Jesus. He is here. Let yourself be loved by him. Give him your heart. Your faith in him will make you well. Amen.

King Duncan’s message “Good News for Broken Hearts” and James Moore’s message “Love One Another” were helpful resources for me as I prepared this sermon.



11180 Medlock Bridge Road Johns Creek, GA 30097  
770-497-8215 [www.johnscreekumc.org](http://www.johnscreekumc.org)