

“TAKE ANOTHER LOOK!”
Luke 7:36-8:3
Dr. Charles D. Yoost, Senior Pastor

Simon was already a little uptight. After all, he had invited Jesus to his house for dinner, and he wasn't sure how it would go. You've hosted dinners or parties like that, haven't you? Those that made you a little anxious. You wonder, will the guests hit it off with one another? Will certain people you have invited fit in? Will everyone still be speaking to each other when the evening is over?

Well, for starters, a woman shows up at the door, ready to party, who hasn't even been invited and who is of questionable reputation. Her hair is not the style of respectable women, but rather hangs loosely, the way prostitutes wear their hair. I've already mentioned that she comes into Simon's house uninvited. She dares to touch Jesus, and even kisses his feet. This is completely unacceptable according to the social and religious practices of the day. Then she takes an alabaster jar --- obviously a valuable container ---- and pours expensive ointment on Jesus' feet. Then she uses her hair to dry Jesus' feet!

Simon is outraged. First of all, the behavior of the woman is inappropriate. Now she has managed to get the attention of everyone at the party. Most offensive of all, Jesus allows her to do all this with no reprimand or word of condemnation. “Some prophet this is,” Simon says to himself. “He doesn't even recognize that this woman is straight from the red light district and has no business at a dinner party for invited dignitaries and other well-chosen guests.”

Either Simon's face gives him away, or else he made his comments in a stage whisper that Jesus overhears, for Jesus is quick to sense Simon's disapproval. **“Do you see this woman?”** Jesus asks his host. See her? How could I not see her? The way she is dressed; the way she has taken over and stolen the show ever since she showed up at the door? Yes, I see that woman. I also see that her disgusting actions are ruining my dinner party!

Then I imagine Jesus repeats the question, **“Do you see this woman?”** The implication is that Jesus' host, this self-righteous, religious person, doesn't really see this woman. He looks and sees someone with a label, someone who has been pigeon-holed as a “sinner.” That is all he sees. But when Jesus looks at this woman, he sees a “daughter of Abraham.” She is also a member of the family of God. She also has a claim upon the goodness and mercy of God.

“Do you see this woman?” asks Jesus. It is a revealing question. No, Simon the Pharisee doesn’t really see the woman. He sees only a “sinner.” He ignores the rest of her. Jesus sees otherwise.

Someone has said that we ought to pronounce the word “ignorance” as ignor – ance. There is a willful quality about the things we claim not to know. Much of what we do not know, we really do know, but it is hard for us to admit that we know. We ignore.

There is a great deal of “Ignore” in our ignorance. Elsewhere Jesus complains about those who “see but do not really see.” I heard a story recently about a person who encountered a man standing on the street corner on his way to work. Every day he walked by this man in tattered clothes, with his hand out, seeking money. “When I first went to work there, I noticed him,” the man said. “But some months later, when one of my co-workers said to me, ‘You know, that man that stands on the corner every day, begging?’ I said, ‘But he isn’t there anymore, is he? He used to be there, but now he is gone.’”

“My co-worker insisted that he was still there. The next morning on my way to work, I was startled and shocked to see the man standing there on the corner, just as he had always been, with his hand out. And yet my ability to see him had overlooked him, had been blinded. I no longer noticed him. It really became a spiritual challenge to me to realize that I had grown accustomed not to seeing him in my mind.”

“The next day I left for work a bit early, and I went up to the man and talked to him for the first time. I found out that he was down on his luck. I found out that he had once worked near that very street corner, and a lot of other information. At the end of our conversation, when I opened my wallet and pulled out a ten dollar bill, he wouldn’t take it. He said, ‘It was just good to talk with you this morning. That’s the best thing that you can give me.’”

The man reflected, “I believe God sent that man to me to make me better at seeing people.” (1)

The distinguished African American scholar, Michael Eric Dyson, in his recent book, *Pride*, tells about his development as a writer. Dyson was born to a poor family in the depths of inner-city Detroit. Indications were that he would be trapped forever in the cycle of poverty and despair that gripped his neighborhood. But as a young man, Dyson read Ralph Ellison’s classic work, *Invisible Man*. Dyson said when he read the first sentence of the book, his soul was stripped open.

“I am an invisible man,” said Ellison. “People choose not to see me.” I remember reading that book in a college English course. In that book, Ellison talks about what it is too often like to be black in white America. The ways that people look right through you and don’t notice you. The ways that people refuse to acknowledge your presence among them or take not of who you are, what you are thinking or saying.

Dyson says that book changed his life, and put him on the path to artistic and intellectual leadership. He realized that he had been cast in the role of the invisible person. He determined right then and there that he would do everything in his power to become visible. Today he is a distinguished professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a Baptist preacher. (2)

“Do you see this woman?” asks Jesus. Not only do you see her, but will you treat her as a child of God?

It seems to me that this story is really about two sinners, not just one. One sinner is a nameless woman who wanders the streets of the city and intrudes into Simon’s dinner party. The other sinner is Simon! Upstanding, follow-the-book, letter of the law Simon in his ignor-ance has not grasped the message of the Gospel. Not only is he unconcerned about his invited guest,

he has also let his frustration over this woman overshadow his devotion to his invited guest. Jesus gently points out that Simon has become so frustrated that he has failed “Hospitality 101.” More than that, in his own self-righteous arrogance, he has failed to see his own need for the forgiving love of God.

I just said that this story is about two sinners. But it is really about all sinners. It would be a mistake for us to focus exclusively on Simon and the woman with the jar of ointment. We need to focus on Jesus and on the lessons we can learn from this story. We need to “see” what Jesus sees and to see how he sees. For, you see, Jesus uses the story of this sinful woman and her extravagant gratitude to teach Simon some things about the life of faith. Jesus points out that this woman in her humility had grasped some theological principles that Simon in his self-righteous piety had still to learn. Simon in his ignorance had not grasped several important concepts that the woman in our story clearly understands.

First of all, this nameless woman knows that **she needs forgiveness**. It is a basic tenet of our faith that all of us stand in need of God’s grace. All of us are sinners, not just those who commit the most flagrant of wrong-doings. Sin means missing the mark; choosing our way rather than God’s way. All of us are guilty of that from time to time. I had a woman tell me one time in all seriousness that she had never done anything so terrible as to cause Jesus to die on the cross. She is wrong. She has missed the point, you see. The Bible tells us that when you’ve committed one sin, you’ve committed them all. Not one of us can stand before God with a clean slate. It’s not a matter of degrees of badness. It’s a fact of the human condition. What Simon didn’t see was that all of us, himself included, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us stand in need of the means of grace that God alone can give.

Second, this woman knows to **turn to Jesus**. She didn’t go to the local drug store and purchase a self-help book. She didn’t Google “Spirituality” and download some helpful articles. She turned to Jesus. She discovered that Jesus would forgive her: generously, completely, without reservation, without qualification. She soon learned that faith is more about having a relationship with Jesus than it is about keeping up the social standards of the day.

Third, this woman responded with **overflowing gratitude**. How much do you think that ointment cost? She wasn’t concerned about the cost, you see. She simply wanted to show her gratitude to the one who had changed her life. Is your heart filled with overflowing gratitude? Do you know the joy of thankfulness and love?

The day that woman met Jesus, her life was changed. The Bible says that her faith saved her. No more prostitution! No more life on skid row! This woman made a complete turnaround. She had a conversion experience, if you will, as she gave her heart and her life to Jesus.

What about Simon? Was his life changed? Did he see the light? Did he overcome his ignorance? Did he see that he, too, needed forgiveness? Did he recognize that having a relationship with Jesus was the most important thing in the world? Did his heart eventually overflow in gratitude and love? Did he, too, respond generously and extravagantly in appreciation for the new life that Jesus made possible for him?

I hope so. I pray so, with all my heart. But the truth is, the Bible doesn’t say. The Bible tells us that the woman was saved by her faith. But the story concludes without another word about Simon.

What about you? What about me? Have we heard Jesus’ words of forgiveness this morning? Have we taken them to heart? Are our lives different because of what we have seen

and heard? Are we able to see people as Jesus sees them, not only for what they are, but for who they might with God's grace become?

Agnes Bojaxhiu didn't go to college, never got married, and never owned a car. But she gave her life to the Lord's service on the streets of Calcutta. She won a Nobel Prize and founded a work that cares for 500,000 hungry families and 90,000 lepers worldwide. We know her as Mother Teresa. A few years before she died, she was asked what would happen to her work when she was no longer able to do it. "I believe that if God finds a person even more useless than me, He will do even greater things through her," Mother Teresa replied. (3) Do you see your life as God sees it? What does God have in store for you?

As we reflect on this story of Simon and the woman who crashed his party, I want to ask each of you, how are you feeling? Are you feeling condemned by your actions or set free by God's grace? If you are feeling like Simon, **take another look** at Jesus, and experience the grace that he is ready to share with you. Take another look at the world around us. Ask God to help you see other people not only for who they have been and who they are, but for who they might by God's grace become.

If you are feeling like the woman; if you know your need for God's grace; if you are able to recognize and respond to the outstretched arms of Jesus, and let your heart overflow with gratitude and love, don't hold back! God is calling each of us to **take another look**. We must not ignore the needs of the world, not even for one day, but share the good news of God's love with all that we meet.

Take another look! Your sins are forgiven! Rejoice! Go and serve God in all that you do!

Notes:

1. Quoted in Sharp, David P. *The Clergy Journal* Jan/Feb. 2010, p. 37-38.
2. Willimon, William H. *Pulpit Resource.*, p. 50-51.
3. *Ibid.* p. 51.