

“Seeing People”

Luke 7:36-50, 1 John 4:19, John 15: Select Phrases & Colossians 1:19-20

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Prayer for Understanding Almighty God your word is a fountain of truth, a wellspring of love and living water for our souls. Helps us to drink deeply of your living, quenching word. Amen

Jesus said: **Luke 7:44 “Do you see this woman?”** Not seeing others, not seeing our true self, is a serious sin. Sin is a negative condition that if left unhealed regularly by God’s grace, yields a miserable life. Sin is alienation, to choose not to see certain people. Sin is alienation, to choose not to see the unloving aspects of one’s life, to choose not to receive God’s healing grace, therefore not to see one’s potential to love extravagantly, to expand the love of the cosmos forever. Sin is alienation to choose not to see God, the source of love, which makes it hard to receive and share love. John proclaims: **1 John 4:19 “We love because God first loved us.”** In our scripture today, we discover that we love when we see the sin in our self, receive God’s healing grace, and respond in gratitude with love.

Sin is separateness, to choose to cut certain people out of our life, to cut an aspect of our self out of our thoughts. Jesus said: **John 15: Select Phrases NLT “I am the true grapevine, and God is the gardener. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to God. “I have loved you as God loves me. Remain in my love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! You did not choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit. This is my command: Love each other.** Notice it begins with God loving us, forgiving us, healing us. God chooses everyone. God offers redeeming grace to everyone. Then, each person has the free will to choose whether or not to receive God’s forgiving, healing grace which enables one to love extravagantly. One can choose to remain connected to the vine, connected to all people sharing nourishment, life, and love or choose to be cut off, to be separate, to be dry, lifeless, and devoid of love.

Sin is freezing. Dorothy Soelle wrote: “Sin is the Ice Age—this slow advance of cold, a freezing process which we experience and try to forget. Sin is the absence of warmth, love, caring, trust. Sin is the destruction of our capacity for relatedness. Sin means being separated from the ground of life, having a disturbed relationship to ourselves, our neighbor, the creation, and the human family.”

Sin is alienation, separateness and freezing which each express a nuance of what Augustine explained. Sin is being bent over on top of one’s self. Sin is choosing to curve one’s heart inward on select aspects of self. Sin is not seeing others. Sin is not seeing one’s full, true self.

The sin of not seeing, alienation, separateness, and freezing afflicts everyone. Sin is so pervasive that it is camouflaged. Tragically, sin is often taken as the way things will always be making us delusional, thinking that some people will always be separated, cut off, alienated, some aspect of our self will always be broken. God’s grace proclaims that sin will be banished. All people will enjoy connection, warmth, and belonging to one family. Scripture proclaims: **Colossians 1:19-20 MSG “So spacious is Jesus, so expansive that everything, everyone, finds its proper place in God. All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies.”**

The religious leader, Simon, refused to see people who lived different from himself. Simon chooses to alienate himself, to be separate, to be frozen from anyone outside of his small, narrow-minded group. These religious leaders became so comfortable in their bent over conversations with themselves that their relational poverty never dawns on them. They have chosen to live in a small space that their mind has made into a barricaded fortress.

John Shea wrote: “However, when a flowing, belonging person who is in communion with God and neighbor breaks into human life, sin’s cover is blown. In the free life of this one person the prisons of others are exposed. Theologically put, it is in the presence of grace that sin is clearly seen. In this sense, Jesus did not badger people to repent. Repenting was simply what other people found themselves doing in order to participate in the flow of life God was offering. It is also in this sense that Jesus held up the overflowing life of the woman as a mirror to Simon. Jesus

wanted Simon to see himself as he was and himself as he could be. Jesus led him to decision's edge. Jesus is not angry. Jesus is an invitation to fullness. The seriousness of sin is that sin teaches us to believe a lie about ourselves and to defend that lie against the revelation of truth. Sin tells us we are isolated individuals with scarce resources and meager means who need to oppress others in order to live. But when we turn from this lie, we find ourselves extravagant lovers of God and our neighbor. People who uncontrollably burst into glorifying God. The Samaritan leper lovingly praises God. The Good Samaritan finds himself extending loving care to the wounded man. Zacchaeus finds himself lovingly giving half his goods to the poor and paying back anyone he has defrauded fourfold. Since we have traded communion for separateness, belonging for alienation and flow for frozen, we are living by a greater life, a life not our own. The alabaster jar is broken and the perfume is pouring out. It is even possible if we take a piece of bread and break it, we can become food for others."

The gospel of Luke explains: **Luke 7:36-50 NLT** "One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind Jesus at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She is a sinner!" Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. Then Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman. When I entered your home, you did not offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?" And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

The essence of our scripture is one can reject grace and be loveless or one can accept grace and love extravagantly. Every moment of your life can be a fresh start. You can choose grace to forgive your past, accept grace to live in the present and welcome grace to make your love extravagant.

Simon did not see this woman. Simon perceives a member of a class, a sinner, an unclean woman far beneath himself. Simon and the religious leaders took the command to love and gradually stripped out all love with their laws, rules, judgements, and justifications. Simon was blinded to his lack of love. Simon was unable to see himself. Simon saw only black and white, clean, and unclean. Simon saw an unclean woman, making Jesus unclean by her touch. The religious leaders were obsessed with touch. What appearances, laws and behaviors are we obsessed with today? How are we failing to truly see our society, to see the sin, to see the way our culture, politics, and religion alienates, separates, and freezes out certain people?

Simon smothered love by making mental categories, ranking certain behaviors, and putting people in boxes. If a person belongs to a certain group, believes certain things, lives a certain way then they needed to change before Simon would love them. God commands us to love everyone, to love everyone the way they are. We are commanded to see people, to see people as God sees people, to see people through the lens of grace which removes every imperfection to reveal the wonder of each person, for everyone is created in the image of God, everyone is good at our core, everyone is designed for extravagant love. Sin has distorted everyone's goodness, yet the goodness is always there. God's grace will set each person's goodness free. Sin has distorted everyone's extravagant love, yet we always have free will to love. God's grace will enable everyone to love extravagantly. So, what is it that blinds you from seeing others? If a person dresses a certain way, do you perceive only the clothes and do not see the goodness of the person? If a person lives a certain lifestyle, do you perceive only the lifestyle and do not see the goodness of the person? If a person belongs to a certain organization, political party, religion, or race do you perceive only their affiliation and do not see the goodness of the person? What is it that binds you from seeing people?

Lighting fast assumptions happen in our mind. We think things to our self and we think we are safe because they are only thoughts in the secret space of our mind where we talk to ourselves. Our assumptions and thoughts can dimmish our love. In our mind, one can make judgements thinking they will not be challenged. God knows every

thought. Jesus was listening to Simon's thoughts so Jesus shared with Simon a parable. Through the parable, Jesus turns Simon's inner monologue into a dialogue. Jesus told the parable to enable Simon to see himself, to see his alienation from this woman, to see how the life he constructed is separating himself from this woman, to see how his thoughts, assumptions, morals, rules, laws are freezing him from a warm loving relationship with this woman. Jesus told the parable to hold up a mirror to Simon's inner monologue so Simon can see his sin, not to condemn Simon rather to invite him to receive grace, forgiveness, healing so Simon can really see this woman and love her extravagantly. Jesus' parable is inviting you to search yourself, to listen to your thoughts, to see the ways you alienate, separate, and freeze yourself from others, to see the ways you judge, divide, and categorizes so you can choose to receive grace, be forgiven, healed, and enabled to love extravagantly.

When a doable debt is forgiven, one is relieved. When an undoable debt is canceled, one rises from the dead, gratitude overflows into love, a love more extravagant than the debt forgiven. All of us owe God an undoable debt, for each of us is failing to love all people, to fully love God and completely love every aspect of our self. God is freely offering grace, forgiveness, healing which enables us to love.

Jesus asks Simon who will love more the one forgiven the doable debt or the undoable debt. Simon supposes it is the one with the undoable debt, which is the correct answer, yet only tentatively correct. Simon supposes, he is guessing at the obvious math, rather than feeling the gut-wrenching recognition of the movement from hopelessness to hope, from deadness to life, from anguish to joy. It is this failure of deep living, of never having been pulled from the pit that makes Jesus' second question so difficult, "Do you see this woman?" Jesus wants Simon to see the woman through God's eyes. Simon who has never known forgiveness so deep it can release extravagant love, does not answer. Simon may see a "kind of woman," but Simon cannot see and does not know this overflowing fountain of tears, hair, perfume, and kisses. Jesus tells Simon why this woman remains a stranger to him. When a person experiences grace, God's forgiving, healing love, they are set free to love extravagantly. When one receives grace, forgiveness, healing human love is permeated with divine love that overflows. Up until this point, Simon has rejected grace. Simon remains outside the release of love that forgiveness provides. Simon has no overflow of tears, kisses, and perfume. Simon is withheld. Simon chooses to imprison his love by his judgmental self-monologue. Simon is so wrapped up in himself, in his self-enclosed ignorance that he is blind to another insight of Jesus' teaching.

Jesus told the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." Simon and the religious leaders grumble. Who is Jesus to forgive sins? Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Faith in this account is the choice to receive God's grace. Faith is the choice to be forgiven, to be free of guilt, regret, and fear of failure. Faith, receiving forgiveness, enables one to love extravagantly. Jesus identifies the source of the woman's love her choice to accept grace, forgiveness, and healing. We love because God first loves us. God chooses us. God adopts us into God's family. God connects us to the vine the source of all life and love. God forgives us. When we see that we are loved, chosen, adopted, connected, forgiven our love becomes extravagant.

Simon and the religious leaders have it backwards. Simon thinks faith is certain beliefs, actions, good works, a lifestyle, that faith begins with human action, that we somehow muster up the ability to love. Simon is unable to see that forgiveness is the source of human love. The more one realizes they are forgiven the more capacity they have to love extravagantly. Without grace, forgiveness, one is alienated, separated and frozen. Simon cannot see. Simon thinks Jesus is forgiving the woman's sin in that moment. Rather, Jesus is confirming that her sins have already been forgiven, that she has the faith to accept forgiveness and that forgiveness is the reason why this woman is loving extravagantly. Simon and the religious leaders struggle to love because they struggle to see themselves, to see that their inner thoughts that are alienating, separating, and freezing them apart from certain people. Until they are able to see themselves, they are unable to see the enormous debt God is forgiving. Until one sees themselves as forgiven, their love is constricted. Jesus confidently proclaims the woman's forgiven state, because she has great love. The woman goes in peace, because peace is the restoration of relationships.

If you are struggling to love someone, then you are struggling to see yourself, to see how God is forgiving you, you are struggling to accept forgiveness. A much forgiven person is a much loved person. The more you see yourself as forgiven the more capable you are of loving all people. A person who struggles to see themselves as forgiven, sees scarcity. A person who sees themselves as forgiven, sees abundance.

Love is stronger than death and the woman sees it. The woman is the real knower. Love and knowing have become one in her. She is the model for all who have been led by love into awareness of their true selves and know God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Resurrector of our true selves. The woman is our model of love itself — needed, given, forgiving, healing, received, and passed on. The woman is a stand-in for all of us who seek an intimate and loving relationship with God and all people.

A ruling elder once said to me, “God’s grace can be compared to an umbrella....in the rain and storm that happen, the umbrella can keep you from getting completely soaked. The storm does not go away, but you have the umbrella to see you through it, but only if you choose to “open” it up. Some people go through life simply carrying the umbrella, never opening it up.”

When one sees themselves and accepts grace, they are transformed from a negative grump who only sees a world full of problems to a person who sees all people, sees infinite ways to love, and loves extravagantly. Amen.