

TFTD 2025.09 Friday March 14th

"Do you see this woman?" Luke 7.36—8.3



Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee by Dirk Bouts, c. 1450)

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.'... Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.'

What stands out for you in this morning's passage? For me the key verse to focus on is verse 44, when Jesus turns to Simon and asks "Do you see this woman?" This is the question that Jesus puts not only to Simon his host, but to us as well. Luke often uses 'seeing' as a metaphor for faith. Seeing Jesus and his deeds leads some to believe, while others turn away.

This dinner party at the house of Simon comes hard on the heels of the inquiry which the disciples of John the Baptist make to Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" Jesus replies to John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are

cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” The issue here is what they see concerning Jesus: are they drawn to faith or do they take offence?

Then after the messengers of John have left, Jesus speaks to the crowds. He asks them what they went out to the desert to see when they followed John the Baptist.

Three times he asks, *“What did you go out to the desert to see---a reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine garments? And again, ‘Then what did you go out to see? A prophet?’* (7.24-26).

This issue of seeing and recognising a prophet, is the objection that Simon raises; if Jesus really was a prophet, then he would know who and what sort of woman this was. This is the backdrop to the dinner at Simon's house – the main characters all see the same things, but they interpret the actions very differently.

Simon's initial judgment is clear — what he sees in this woman who has gate-crashed his party is a sinner and in doing so he concludes that Jesus cannot possibly be a prophet.

Simon's inability to see affects not only his attitude toward this woman, but now also his relationship with Jesus. However, Jesus does not engage in lengthy discourse, but rather tells a parable: *‘A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?’* Simon answered, *‘I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.’* And Jesus said to him, *‘You have judged rightly.’*

Simon quickly gets the point when it's presented to him in story form. But then comes the real test: Jesus turns to the woman, but says to Simon, *“Do you see this woman?”* It's an attempt to persuade Simon to see the world as Jesus sees it. But can Simon adopt this new way of seeing? We just don't know. Like all good parables, the story is open-ended and it remains for us to finish.

But what it does do is to invite us to take up the challenge given to Simon and adopt Jesus' way of seeing others. We have to ask ourselves the question, *‘Do I actually see the person in front of me? Or has my vision been coloured by other people's interpretations? Have I ever taken the time to think through for myself the carefully manufactured labels that are so easy to stick on other people?’*

How do I see?

Lenten blessings Linda

