

First Trinity Lutheran Church  
June 17, 2007, Father's Day  
Text: Luke 7:11-17

### **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?**

Many years ago Sidney Poitier starred in a movie called, GUEST WHO IS COMING TO DINNER. Sidney Poitier, a black man for all who do not know, played a controversial role which was very much a taboo, it was a no-no of that time, where a Black man was engaged to marry a white woman. By taking this role some say that Sidney may even have put his life at risk. Nevertheless, it demonstrated the problems, the biases, and the racism that lived not only then but also still now in 2007. He had not only to tell his parents but the greatest hurdle was revealed in breaking the news of their relationship to her white parents and seeking their blessing. The couple decided to break the news over dinner to all four parents at the white parent's house, thus "Guest Who Is Coming to Dinner" was born.

Many a story can be told and the experiences shared while breaking bread. Stories of business associations being strengthened, and friends and relatives reaffirming their care for one another have often taken place over a meal. Many a couple have begun and grown their relationship and affection for one another over a meal, and it is a well known fact that relationships have been enhanced and ended over the dinner table.

In these scripture readings for today many themes can be pulled out and developed. So much so that it is hard to focus on just one. But today I want to focus on the theme of equality and forgiveness. There are many ways in society in which such artificial categorization and discrimination can replace the simple acceptance by God for all of us. Sometimes, changing social environments have produced in-groups that organize along lines of exclusivity in order to keep out unwanted people. Masonic Societies, country clubs, and Boy Scouts have at times been structured with restrictive entrance requirements. Housing subdivisions, barber shops and buses at one time could choose the customers they wanted. Sometimes restrictive language is used to

keep people out. Merit systems are another way to keep people out and to allow those in authority to determine who is acceptable. Even the church has fallen prey to such practice,

In the church there is no good reason to exclude anyone. In the first place, there is no Biblical basis for a selective society, certainly not in a Scripture-based community which believes that in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free, but all are equal. Secondly, the psychological or theological dynamic operating behind merit systems is not what Jesus taught. In society in general, and specifically in the church, such a focus on artificial standards and merit systems has always led to divisions. For this reason, today's text is wonderfully emancipating, if not downright shocking. It frees us from the need to meet anyone's standards and to hold anyone up to ours. Listen to what happens in our text. There is a dinner party. People have been invited. Jesus is reclining on a couch at table (the common Roman practice for freedmen). Suddenly an uninvited guest comes in. She is a woman with a reputation, a local prostitute, known by others in the room. She follows a common practice of a lower servant class, by not only washing Jesus' feet which are dusty from walking with sandals on dirt roads, but washing them with her perfume and drying them with her hair.

What do you think is really going on in this story? It's a striking lesson for Simon, but also for all of us, about the importance of acknowledging the source of love. Simon hadn't yet made the discovery. As a result, he didn't wash Jesus' feet, greet him with a kiss, and put oil on his head, all of which were standard courtesies to be expected from a host for special guests. Simon wasn't motivated. He knew the rules, but knowing standards, laws, principles, and right behavior never motivates. This woman, who apparently had previously heard Jesus speak about God's extravagant kindness and complete forgiveness, couldn't stop sharing in her own way the love in her which comes from joy and thanksgiving. She had found and acknowledged the source of love and it made all the difference in the world to her. God's unconditional acceptance of her had created love in action.

The Pharisee did not greet Jesus with a kiss. In effect to not give this greeting was to ignore Jesus. It would be like being invited to someone's home for dinner. The door is open, so you assume they intend for you to come in, but the family members are busy watching television and never rise from the La-Z-boy, to acknowledge you or say "hello." The washing of feet was mandatory before a meal. If the guest was of high status, the host would perform this duty himself. If not, he might have his servant do it.

Jesus arrived at the Pharisees' home and receives nothing. Simon does not give him a greeting, no water for his feet and no anointing for his head. Everyone present knows that Jesus is being treated rudely as if a deliberate slap in the face.

A sinful woman, a prostitute, heard about Jesus being in the home. She must have had a longing to have a changed life. She gathers all her courage and slips into the house. She took on the role of the host and washes Jesus' feet and anoints them with her oil of perfume. To the complaint of Simon the Pharisee Jesus tells a story of a Loan Shark and two Bookies. Two men owed money to a moneylender. Neither could pay it back. They both faced the same fate – to lose all they had and go to prison. The only difference, one owed fifty thousands dollars and the other 5 thousand dollars. The loan shark calls them in and forgives their debts.

Jesus looked straight at Simon and asked: "Which one will be filled with relief and gratitude and joy for the one who has set him free from his debt and jail sentence? Little-debt or big-debt? Simon answers: "I suppose it would be Big-debt." Jesus speaks directly to Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Simon doesn't see her as Jesus does. Jesus sees her heart turned toward repentance and her humility. "You gave me no water for my feet. You did not give me a kiss. You did not put oil on my head." She washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She kissed my feet and poured perfume on them. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven, for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you go in peace."

Sometimes people think that words and concepts don't make any difference, that in the Church we are all about the same thing, trying to be good in the hope that God will be good to us. We, too many assume, are about rules and standards and morals and merits. And we are also about applying them to people who don't measure up so they can be excluded, be put on the outside by us who inhabit the inside.

The shocking thing about this story, however, is that it makes clear that words and concepts do make a difference, all the difference in the world. The good news of God's love for us, alone can transform us. Recognizing that God is so loving that his love covers every shortcoming and fault carried out by us, alone can make us new. If we accept such extravagant love as expressed at the cross and empty tomb, how will this transform us in our everyday living.

All of have been created equal. No one is better than anyone one else. We should know this because with all our shortcomings and failures there is a love from God almighty who accept even us. How do we live our life now? Let me suggest that there is someone very close to each of us whose feet are waiting to be washed, and we should never miss an opportunity to wash those feet. Amen!