
Faith Makes Things Possible—Not Easy

A sermon by CanonCarolynne Williams
Proper 6 – Year C

A dinner party is being held at the home of Simeon. Simeon was a Pharisee. This meant that he was a businessman and so were most of the others who were invited to dine. The invited guests were arriving as well as others who were not invited. Socially, during this time in history, it was not unusual for people to wander into the homes of complete strangers, where a party was taking place. As long as they were men and looked as if they “belonged,” they were welcomed.

Jesus was invited by Simeon and Simeon acknowledged Jesus when he arrived. But the normal hospitality was not offered by Simeon to Jesus, of having the dust removed from his feet. One person did offer this hospitality, however, and she was a sinner.

This woman who was NOT invited. Also, the unnamed woman was known to the community as a sinner. A woman and a sinner. She brought with her a model of shame and dishonor to Simeon’s home, in other people’s opinion.

Those who saw her immediately became judgmental and believed she brought a level of shame and dishonor to the home of an important businessman in the community. Simeon was tolerant, however, because he had heard about the work that was being done by this prophet, this man called Jesus, as some referred to him.

Those who were invited knew they had to maintain certain decorum to meet the criterion. Others had to restrain themselves from expressing what they really felt and believed about this woman, this sinner being there.

This unnamed woman who lived in the community, as well, went to the home of Simeon because she had encountered an experience. This experience literally changed her. She discovered that the love that was given to her by this prophet had enabled her to discover she could, for the first time in her life, LOVE herself. This freedom enabled her to love GOD. For her to understand she had been forgiven her sins and was able to embrace another in spite of her shame and dishonoring Simeon’s home as others viewed her.

This unnamed woman was filled with gratitude and love for God. She wanted to express her love to him by removing the dust from his feet and anointing his feet with an extravagant oil.

The disciples were angry with her because of her *using* this extravagant oil on their leaders feet. This unnamed woman had become free through accepting the love of God for her through her faith.

Her faith in God’s power placed her in a position to NOT be affected by the constraints of life during that time nor be adversely affected by the people who tried to oppress her.

She was living within the protection of one of whom she knew truly loved her and had the power to forgive her, of her sins.

Did the men sin too? Yes they did, but she was not important enough to be given a name.

Her love grew into a vast deposit of compassion; this deep love through the freedom of having faith was life changing. She never desired to be the center of attention. She was drawn to the love that released her to be herself and to realize her full potential. That release into living was stronger than anything else in her life. The love that she received gave her an

undergirding that she had not experienced in life before. This protection gave her a steadiness in living and seeking and being present for others and living and giving from a place of gratitude. Not from a place of fear and loss. She was transformed to a place of living within the strength of God's love.

Shame in our lives, be man or woman, is often an underlying factor in life's social tragedies such as addictions and violence.

This unnamed woman had been lifted logically and spiritually to a level that she knew and understood. She had accepted God's present love and was overflowing with a sense of forgiveness.

When we believe and strive to live authentically, we are drawn to those places of love. When we attempt to live authentically, we discover God's love beyond our dreams. What this woman was in the midst of them, choosing to move toward love may not seem possible or realistic to us.

This unnamed woman was willing to risk being denigrated on every level when it came to possessing human dignity because she wanted to live the rest of her earthly life within the folds of God's love.

She desired the freedom which was revealed through perceived weaknesses to be able to love in a manner in which she was truly protected.

As an aside, but certainly not diminished, Muhammad Ali's faith, especially during the second half of his life, sustained him through his weakness in body. He did not shut down. He released, through his faith, a dependence greater than himself, for all to see. He did not isolate himself and turn inward. His faith was strong and evident, according to those who spoke at his service.

Did the unnamed woman who was uninvited take a risk? How was she protected? She understood that she was loved by one who was responsible for her being truly forgiven.

She took risks when she went to the dinner, uninvited.

She took risks when she revealed her love and gratitude to the one who told her that her sins were forgiven and she was to live in peace.

She took a risk when she accepted the magnitude of this gift.

This unnamed woman had a vision that she really could not explain. All she could do is to recall the actions of the one who looked at her heart and touched her inner spirit through love. This enabled her to move forward to a direction she perhaps not considered before.

Having faith does not cause trying circumstances to disappear. Having faith in an entity greater than ourselves, has the promise of building a relationship that is life giving, long lasting and eternal. It has the potential of making newness of our lives in ways we could not have imagined. Making life new has power within itself when love is the centerpiece.

Pope Francis, in his book entitled *Walking With Jesus*, says this:

"It is impossible to believe on our own. Faith is not simply an individual decision that takes place in the depths of the believer's heart, nor is it a completely private relationship between the 'I' of the believer and the divine 'thou' between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the "we" of the church, it is always takes place within her communion.

"When we say 'We believe' beginning the Nicene Creed, our belief is expressed in response to an invitation, to a word that must be heard and the word is not our own; It exists as a part of a dialogue and cannot be merely a profession originating in an individual. We can respond in the singular—'I believe' only because we are part of a greater fellowship, only because we also say 'We believe.' This openness of God's own love, which is not only a relationship between the Father and the Son, between an 'I' and a 'Thou,' but is also in the Spirit, a 'we,' a communion of persons." (*Walking with God*, p. 79, Pope Francis)

Perhaps, there is a paradox in human nature. Although we long for a deep and intimate relationship with God and the full acceptance of ourselves as we are, we are unable, according to the experts, to tolerate such acceptance if it should come our

way. This resistance to emotional closeness is not just a feature of human relationships with God; it is found very commonly in relationships between people. “True spiritual freedom opens up the unlimited possibility of continual growth and development through our relationship with God.” (The Cost of Certainty, p. 24, Jeremy Young)

The unnamed woman achieved a level of intimacy with the one who loved her unconditionally because she accepted the power of his love for her. She experienced an over whelming moment of gratitude and freedom.

“Jesus says to her and to us, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.”

Amen.