

## LUKE 7:36-8:3 AND 2 SAMUEL 11:26-12:10. 13-15

In 1985 Tracey and I bought our first home a small two up/two down cottage in an East Devon village. Soon after moving in we decided to head down to the village pub for an evening meal and begin our first foray into village life. As we approached the pub I saw there were two doors which you could enter by - one had no sign on it and the other had a sign saying Village Bar on it and from behind that door I could hear lots of voices and laughter. As newcomers to the village this was the obvious place to start. I boldly led the way and opening the door stepped into a small but crowded bar. As we began our approach to look at the menu on the wall the whole room became completely silent as conversations stopped one by one. After what seemed like an eternity a red faced man chirped up, 'Are you here for the darts?' - my feeble reply was, 'No we're here for a meal'. 'You'll be wanting the other side then,' he said, 'the Lounge Bar'. Tracey told me afterwards that she had never seen me turn so red before. It was an acutely embarrassing episode and I have never felt so awkward or so unwelcome in a place before or since.

In our Gospel today Jesus is invited to the house of Simon the Pharisee - we don't know quite why Simon has invited the young rabbi for dinner - Is he genuinely interested in Jesus' teaching or to find out if Jesus really is a prophet as the people are saying? Or is he along with his other Pharisee friends looking for an occasion to trip Jesus up in what he does or says? Because as the story unfolds we learn that the welcome Jesus received was about as warm and civil as the one Tracey and I had at the village pub. Hospitality in Middle Eastern culture is a serious business on entering a home as a guest you would be greeted with a kiss usually on the face. After you would be seated on a stool and water and olive oil would be brought for the washing of hands and particularly feet which would be very dirty. This would be the minimum requirement for being civil. Jesus received none of these and therefore Simon is being not only un-hospitable he is being knowingly rude and offensive and yet despite this humiliation and rudeness Jesus stays on to recline at the dinner table instead of turning on his heel and saying I can see I am not welcome here and leaving. Why? Because he wants to win the heart of this Pharisee and show him God's love and forgiveness.

But there is another person present who is even less welcome - a woman who Luke identifies as a likely prostitute. Meals like these often took place in an area that opened out onto a courtyard and it was normal for uninvited people to congregate and listen to the conversation of the diners particularly if they were famous or important. This woman has arrived ahead of Jesus because she has found out he is the invited guest at Simon's house. Why does she come? Why does she brave the judgement, the rejection, the embarrassment of entering a place she knows will be full of people who will despise and reject her? Why is she there? There is only one reason, one compelling all consuming motive for pushing through all that - and that is simply **gratitude**. This woman comes carrying her alabaster jar of ointment to specifically anoint Jesus. We must not think that her tears, her gift or her humility in any way provoke Jesus' forgiveness - she does not earn his mercy or love rather Jesus states, 'her sins that were many have been forgiven'. At some time previous to this - this woman has heard Jesus teaching about the love and grace of God - the God who forgives the worst, the helpless and the hopeless and she has responded to the love of Christ. She knows she is the 500 denarii debtor, she knows she couldn't pay but she has already received forgiveness, she has begun to live a new life of freedom from guilt and shame and she comes seeking Jesus out of gratitude - she wants to say thank you because she knows also that someone has to pay and that person is Jesus. And she comes not just say thank-you but to demonstrate it the best way she can! Gratitude compels her to that place and compels her to act. So why are we here today? What on earth are we doing in this place today? Well you might say we have come to the Parish Eucharist. Quite right but as good Anglicans you can tell me that the word 'Eucharist' actually means, 'act of thanksgiving'. We're here to give thanks, we're here out of gratitude too, we're here to celebrate the fact that whether we are 500 denarii debtors or 50 it makes no difference - none of us can pay and yet Jesus has done exactly that at the Cross. Our coming here today doesn't earn us any favours like the woman we come because we also know the love and forgiveness of God in Christ - it's all gift, everything is free. Our challenge today is whether we can after receiving this Eucharist actually live Eucharistic lives - lives of thanksgiving. That was the challenge King David faced.

G K Chesterton said, 'When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude'. As we consider King David in our OT reading today we find David at a time in his life when he has it all he has the girls, the gold and the glory to quote a famous phrase and yet despite it all David who we must recognise as the foremost worshipper in the OT the writer of so many wonderful Psalms - at this point in his life he has slipped from gratitude to taking it all for granted. He has forgotten that all of life is gift; he has forgotten all he has been given has been given by God. And in that state he becomes hard hearted and proud and seeing Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite he says I want her too. When gratitude slips out of our lives we begin to believe we are the source of all we have and are. A kind of short-sightedness infects us and like David and like Simon too in our Gospel

reading we think we are just fine - in short we slip into pride and from there into judging others as less than ourselves. I don't know if you like the stories of Winnie the Pooh but one of the lovely characters is Piglet a rather tiny soul - on one occasion A A Milne writes, 'Piglet noticed that even though he had a very small heart it could hold a rather large amount of gratitude'. How lovely to be like that aware that we are so small and at the same time so grateful that God is so great in his love and mercy. It happened for the woman in our story her gratitude leads her to humbly wash the dirty feet of Jesus - she does in fact all that Simon failed to do in his pride – she washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair and she anoints him with her ointment. She found the place of perfect freedom through her gratitude and so can we - thanks be to God!