

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend Courtney Veazey  
Sunday, February 23, 2025

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Prayer for Illumination

God of abundant life,  
your grace is our daily bread.  
Nourish us by your Word  
and fill us with your Spirit  
so that we may grow in faith and love;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke.

*‘One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and when he went into the Pharisee’s house he reclined to dine. 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, 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.” Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “speak.” “A certain moneylender had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward 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 many sins have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little.” Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” But he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”’*

Holy wisdom, holy word.

**Thanks be to God.**

Transformation happens at the table.

Through invitations to recline and dine in another’s home.

Through embodied vulnerability.

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Through extravagant actions that cause us to self-reflect.

Through words spoken and stories told.

Through accountability, forgiveness, and love.

Much happens at the table over a shared meal.

Our Scripture this morning is one of nine meal scenes found within the Gospel of Luke – all of which “function as transformative encounters, embodying the challenge and opportunity of Jesus’ proclamation for those who are present.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus has something to say to us, and we reply, “Teacher, speak.”

How will Jesus’ words to us at the table challenge us and break us open to opportunity?

What will we see and perceive at this table?

An unnamed woman enters Simon’s house looking for Jesus.

An unnamed woman comes to the table bound by the shame that arises when others do not see the fullness of who we are.

The city sees her as a sinner. The meal’s host, Simon the Pharisee, sees her as a sinner.

And although she arrives bound by shame, she intuitively knows that her identity is more than her sin – more than how others perceive her – and she purposefully seeks out the One reclining at the table who releases her from all that binds her.

Carrying an alabaster jar of ointment, she stands behind Jesus, weeps, and bathes Jesus’ feet with her tears.

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<sup>1</sup> Kylie Crabbe, “A Sinner and a Pharisee: Challenge at Simon’s Table in Luke 7:36-50,” *Pacifica* 24 (October 2011).

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The Greek verb for bathe holds significantly more intensity than our English translation. This woman's tears do not solely bathe Jesus' feet. Her tears rain upon them, drenching them, making Jesus' feet soaking wet.

Do we see this woman? And do we see ourselves in this faithful woman? When was the last time that our tears drenched Jesus' feet in response to God's restorative presence in our lives?

I imagine her loosening her hair while she sobs.

*The Book of Symbols*, which reflects upon archetypal images, says that "one of the first ways we register transformation is by something we do to our hair, and hair has ever played a part in...major transitions."<sup>2</sup>

Something is shifting inside her as she sobs and prepares to dry Jesus' feet with her hair.

Grief, gratitude, and pleading swirl together as all that binds her begins to unravel.

She then dries Jesus' soaked feet, kisses those feet, and anoints them with ointment.

Her incarnational, extravagant response startles Simon.

And he wonders to himself, "Does Jesus even know who and what kind of woman is touching him? She is a sinner."

Simon only sees this woman as a sinner, and Jesus prophetically speaks up to expand Simon's limited vision.

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<sup>2</sup> p. 346

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For she is not only a sinner. She is a forgiven woman – a released woman – who knows how to show great love.

What are the limitations of our vision? How often do we see other people only as sinners and forget that we, too, are sinners full of debt and in desperate need of release from what binds us?

The good news is that our sins are forgiven and all our debts are canceled. But do we fully understand the stunning depth of that cancellation in our lives?

Forgiveness means release.

Release from shame, from fear, from regret. Release from individual and communal brokenness. Release from all that constrains and constricts us.

Release *for* an intimate encounter with our Savior in which our offering, our tears, our loosened hair vulnerably point to the healing, transformative work happening within our souls.

Forgiveness not only heals us – it softens us. It enables us to love our God abundantly and extravagantly – a love that pours forth from our bodies. Weeping, kissing, anointing. Feet, tears, and hair.

Do we see this unnamed woman and all that she teaches us about being disciples of Jesus Christ?

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The world feels hard right now, and I deeply desire more softness and vulnerability – a more expansive sight of ourselves and one another. A softness, vulnerability, and expansiveness modeled for us by an unnamed woman offering all of herself to Jesus.

In this harsh world, we are called as disciples of Jesus Christ to embody this softer, more vulnerable way of life as an incarnational response to God’s healing grace.

What would our world be like if we, like this faithful woman, come to the table truly believing the depth of our forgiveness – our release? If we truly heard Jesus’ words to us, “Your sins are forgiven” and “Your faith has saved you”? What would our world be like if we lived from a foundation of wholeness and healing instead of judgment and fear? How then would we love God and our neighbor?

Transformed at the table, released from bondage, we are then able to go in peace to our community and our world, carrying in our bodies the memory of our healing – the salt of tears and scent of ointment. We go in peace – turning toward those often unseen and asking the question that welcomes those on the edges to the table of grace – do you, do we, see this woman? Do we see the ones whom the city-state – the government – knows as sinners but Jesus knows as released and full of great love?

This question is our challenge and opportunity. May our forgiven, healed, and transformed souls expand our sight as we all sit at the table of transformation together.