

Sunday September 12, 2021
 Lesson 2: Being Bold to Join
 Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Context:

The 2021 fall series is titled “Belong.” Each unit will focus on a way the people of God are called to seek community and discover how God has connected us to one another. The first unit focuses upon hospitality and the role hospitality should play in our Christian formation. The second lesson, titled “Being Bold to Join” invites the reader to explore how we are called to grow in sensitivity to the feelings of outsiders, letting that awareness shape our outreach to them.

The lesson is set in the gospel of Luke. Yet the story is one told in all four gospels as Jesus receives an anointing by a woman. Each of the gospels adds details and could hint of one, two, or even three anointings.¹ However, there are variations, and each story has its own theme and emphasis. The account in Luke relates a story of love and forgiveness and should be read on its own as separate from the others in location, time, and purpose.² As we read the story, we see how this theme of love and forgiveness ties to hospitality and being sensitive to those both on the margins and outside the mainstream of our churches.

The setting is not unusual. Often, Jesus was found in the presence of Pharisees, who were upstanding religious people who like Jesus loved the law of Moses and the functions of the synagogue.³ Once again, at a dinner table, Jesus can challenge and focus on good table manners for how people are called to do life together.

While all the guests are the ones you would expect to see at a dinner party, there is an uninvited guest who slips in. A woman labeled a “sinner” comes in and takes perfumed oil to Jesus’s feet after kissing them and wiping them with her hair and tears. The scene is perhaps odd and disturbing to the other guests.

The host has thoughts to himself, even critiquing his guest who would surely as a prophet recognize the woman as a sinner. Yet, Jesus can read minds or at least pick up on body language and has something to say to Simon. Holding up a mirror to Simon, he asks about the hospitality shown to him and how Simon did not wipe his feet or greet him with a kiss. He then talks about the forgiveness granted unto the woman.

The event leads the guests to wonder about Jesus and what his words mean. Who is he? He then tells the woman to “go in peace” and how her faith saves her. The woman leaves, turning the party upside down and revealing to others how outsiders belong at the table of God. No one is condemned or told because they are a sinner, God does want them at God’s table. In fact, God wants all at God’s table as all are loved by God.

¹ Craddock, Fred B. “Luke,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 104.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Application

When I was in both divinity school and in my Doctor of Ministry program, we had to learn about the different generations in America. I am talking about the groupings which place you as the “Silent Generation, Boomer, Gen Xer, Millennial, Gen Z, etc.” Most of the congregations I have served have had people from all the different generations and I have had to learn the characteristics of each group and how to communicate and relate to all. There are beautiful things about each group and every generation has something to offer the church.

As a younger millennial, I have found my generation has had varying experiences with the church. Some of us have had wonderful experiences with the church and have seen how institutions can promise stability and growth. We’ve had Boomer or late Gen X parents who were there to make sure we received care and attention, maybe even a little much at times. We’ve been given so much and yet at times struggle with commitment. Yet, we can see the downside of institutions and occasionally the people left out or hurt by not being in the mainstream much like some of the Gen X began to detect as they grew older.

While I have had many profound experiences within the church with wonderful Christians, I have also had profound epiphanies and revelations with those who are outside the norms of the church, like those who are agnostic or even of a different religion. Sometimes these people have taught me so much about the inclusivity of Christ and how at times the church might be challenged to walk with those who are different from the majority. They are at times patient as I seek to understand complex thought processes and ask deep questions which push me to dive deeper into the Word and seek to understand more about life and faith.

Often, I give God thanks for these people because I realize the gospel is about transforming lives and when Christians begin to think they know everything, we lose our salt. It is often very tempting when reading about scripture to make a little checklist of the people or behaviors Jesus accepts, and the ones Jesus does not. We get really good at setting the perfect table and only inviting or accepting the people who think, believe, or see things just like us. We like the concept of having a perfect dinner party where everything goes exactly like we want.

Yet the older I’ve gotten, the more I realize God may be at work in people I would never suspect, and those people may teach me more about the gospel than I could learn by myself. The question becomes will I be open to the Holy Spirit nudging me to grow and learn more about the people God has set in front of me. Will I listen to Jesus who isn’t afraid to ask me if I am willing to see the power of love and forgiveness?

Every generation has had people hurt by the church. Sometimes it is intentional, and other times, things happen and we miss people somehow. Thankfully God is bigger than us and our constant prayer is other people may experience God’s grace and mercy in their lives. Our role is to be the learners, those who are open to what people might teach us about ourselves and the institutions we love. And we are called to be encouragers, always mindful of how others might show us the amazing love of Christ and be reminded of the forgiveness God has given us for our sins and our shortcomings. As we encourage and accept others, perhaps someone could experience the love of Christ in a way they never have before.

Who is someone outside the church who has taught you more about following

Jesus? Why do you think Jesus wants us to be open to those who are different? How can you examine your own prejudices and see how God loves those people as much as God loves you? What are ways you can learn about those who are different from you? How can the church play a unique role in modeling a loving, inclusive community?

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