



Worship Resources for *Steeple's Ad Run* – Fall 2008

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Luke 7:37-50

Table Grace

That dinner party at the house of Simon, the Pharisee? My guess is there was more than a tiny sprinkling of tension on the menu. Great dollops of awkwardness were plopped on the dishes being served.

On the surface, everything appeared normal: the host and his invited guests reclining and dining; the usual crowd of onlookers out around the edges, like the fans behind the security ropes on Oscar night, hoping for a glimpse of someone famous, oohing and ahhhing over the sumptuousness of the feast.

But then there was this woman who crossed the line. She is described as “a woman”...“in the city”...“who was a sinner”... And, you know, sometimes when we read the Bible and see phrases like that we supply a certain tone or meaning that really wasn't there in the original telling of the tale. This time, though, it's here. The tone. The meaning. No one's offering any explanation of the total economic desperation that drove women to prostitution in 1st Century Palestine. There's no compassion expressed for the girls sold by their fathers into the skin trade of the day. Nope. Just, here was a woman—from the city—who was a sinner and she heard that Jesus was present and she barged in, carrying an alabaster jar, and she wept and carried on, and she bathed his feet with her tears and then dried them with her long soft silky hair, and then she kissed his feet and anointed them with oil. She didn't simply cross the line of socially sanctioned behavior. She obliterated the line that mistakenly declared reverence and hospitality out of bounds. Wiped it out with this shocking display of bad taste.

And the host thought to himself, “Now if this guy, Jesus, is really the prophet he seems to think he is, he won't allow this to go on.” Simon the Pharisee was really offended. Big time.

Did I mention that things were a little awkward, a bit tense?

Jesus attempted to explain: See, Simon, Ellen here has been forgiven much so she is free to love much. You're still a little too restrained, Simon. Ellen the intruder, not you the host, has shown me hospitality at this dinner party.

Hospitality, Joan Chittester has said, is “love on the loose.” It's the wacko etiquette prescribed by the Holy Spirit in Miss Manners guise for every messianic banquet. Hospitality is generosity and cordiality, geniality and friendliness, but it goes deeper than surface kindness. It connects us with that Great Love at the core of creation, the shared humanity that resides in our flesh. In the soft tissue, not skin, not bones. Flesh. Below the externals, above the rigid framework. Connected in the flesh, we gather around the welcome table, not the table of exclusion—we who share some common understanding that Jesus came bearing love for each of us, for all of us. Around the table all are fed. We feed each other, saying implicitly, I want you to live, to thrive, to grow. We are family here, in the circle of hospitality. We take care of one another. We come to the table, each of us in need, wounded, cherished, ready to be whole, touched by grace. All of us. All the people.