

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
June 13, 2010  
Third Sunday after Pentecost (Kingdomtide)  
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:10  
Psalm 32:1-8  
Galatians 2:11-21  
Luke 7:36-50

Our Gospel lesson this morning finds Jesus at the home of a man named Simon, who has invited Jesus to a dinner party. If you've ever attended a formal dinner party, you're aware of the customs and conventions that attach themselves to such an event.

This was true also in the ancient near East, but perhaps to a much greater extent. So when a woman who had not been invited to the party shows up and begins to "make a scene" as she kneels behind Jesus, it becomes clear to Simon and the other guests that Jesus is a fraud, and that he and this woman have violated every rule of social propriety.

Luke takes us into the mind of Simon, and tells us what he and the others are all thinking. Jesus is not a true prophet, or else he would know that this woman is a sinner, an outsider, one who does not belong here. She is not welcome in Simon's home.

But truth be told, neither is Jesus. The customary acts of hospitality that accompanied an event such as this involved the washing of feet, a kiss of peace (like a handshake), and anointing with oil. In our day these might have been the

equivalent of allowing guests to freshen up after traveling to your home, and welcoming them with true gestures of friendship and good will.

And as Jesus enters Simon's home, he is extended *none* of these acts of kindness and hospitality.

The woman's actions -- and Jesus' subsequent story to Simon -- reveal a person who has some issues in his life. He is swimming in a great sea of self-righteousness. His inability to see himself in need of compassion and forgiveness makes it very difficult for him to be a compassionate and forgiving person. His self-righteousness has actually diminished the flow of love through his life.

In his zeal to obey God, Simon has developed spiritual "blind spots" which (ironically) prevent him from truly welcoming Jesus, and from the obedient life he desires.

Simon is an easy target for us. His poisonous attitudes and ridiculous actions serve to paint a huge bulls eye at which we could all take our shots. There's just one tiny problem. Simon is not the only one affected by the dreaded spiritual "blind spots." You and I have them as well.

Our spiritual "blind spots" can affect us like Simon's did him. They can impede and hinder the flow of God's love in us. They can blind us to who Jesus really is, and who Jesus wants *us* to become. And in our zeal to be good Christians, they can sometimes (ironically) lead us to reflect poorly on Christ.

And the trouble with our spiritual “blind spots” is that they are not readily apparent to us. That’s why they are called *blind* spots. We don’t *see* them. If we could readily see them, we might be able to address them, to change our attitudes and actions.

Our Old Testament lesson and our epistle lesson speak to this issue this morning. King David and the apostle Peter are two great examples of the tremendous capacity for self-deception in the spiritual life.

For example, I don’t believe that King David woke up one day and said, “I think I’ll make today a day of lust, greed, abuse of power, and murder, and then went off to stalk Bathsheba. No. Years before, he had begun to develop spiritual “blind spots” when he took hundreds of wives and concubines and brought them into the monarchy. He began to see himself as privileged, as above the law. The deception and the self-deception grew into what became the tragic events that followed.

And Peter experienced a similar situation. God had showed him that Gentiles were fully included in God’s covenant promises. But his treatment of those folks became inconsistent, and the apostle Paul had to publicly confront him about it.

And we're no different. Each of us has spiritual "blind spots" -- areas of our lives where our attitudes or beliefs may actually impede the flow of Christ's love in us and through us. Simon's struggle is also our struggle.

How does Jesus respond to Simon? I think it is possible to see this event in Simon's home as Christ's gracious and merciful way of revealing to Simon his blind spots. Jesus confronts Simon with his true self, so that he might be healed and growth might occur.

And as is typical of Jesus, he doesn't do this by clubbing Simon over the head. He doesn't launch into a nasty tirade. He doesn't give Simon a good verbal dressing down.

He does it by creating a *lived experience* for Simon. He brings him into contact with someone, or in this case, brings someone into contact with him, someone whose actions are like a mirror that is held up to show him who he really is. It is this encounter, this lived experience, that brings Simon's blind spots into the light of day.

Interestingly, we're not told what Simon does subsequent to this encounter. But ultimately, it is not important. The important issue for us is how the Spirit that has come to the Church is empowering *us*, revealing our blind spots so that we might change and grow.

And the Spirit is faithful in doing this. Some may ask, “how do I know what areas of my life might be spiritual “blind spots?”

That’s not easy to answer. But I think that one place to look might be in those areas of our lives where we consider ourselves pretty strong, areas of our lives where we do not struggle and where we are not particularly tempted.

If you don’t struggle with covetousness or greed, then it might be easy for you to become less tolerant and forgiving of those who do.

If you aren’t particularly tempted toward gossip or tearing others down, then it may be more difficult for you to be understanding and forgiving of those who struggle with this.

If you don’t struggle with addiction (of any kind), then you may be less tolerant and loving of those who do.

And often our spiritual blind spots are revealed to us through a lived experience, through meeting or encountering someone, and the very encounter itself becomes a “eureka” moment, a moment like the crashing of a dinner party.

When I was a seminary student, a friend told me a story of how when he was a young boy his aging grandmother came to live with his family. As she grew older, she became less able to care for herself. Her hands became less steady. One day at the lunch table, his grandmother slipped and knocked a glass from the table, breaking it into hundreds of little pieces.

My friend told me his mother became very angry. She cleaned up the glass, and then sent my friend to the store with instructions “I want you to buy a plastic plate and cup for your grandmother.”

My friend was just a boy. But as he made his way to the store, he thought a lot about how his grandmother was feeling.

When he arrived back home, his mother took the sack from his hands. Opening it, she pulled out two plastic plates and two plastic cups.

“What have you done?” His mother angrily asked him. “Why are there two plates and cups here?”

And my friend looked at his mother and said: “I bought one for you, for when *you* are old.”

At that point, my friend’s mom sat down and began to weep. She called her son over to her side, and hugged him and thanked him. Then she went and sought forgiveness from his grandmother.

As we come to the Lord’s table this morning, I want to remind you of something. The Church is the place where we constantly gather to tell the story of *who* we are. And just who are we?

Well, we are the company of those who have been forgiven on a massive, incomprehensible scale. And the bread and wine we share together this morning

are not mere symbols. They are a means of grace to us, empowering us to become more and more those who are capable of great love and forgiveness.

This, in part, is what it means that the Spirit has come to the Church, and is with us during this Kingdomtide. Thanks be to God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.