

Ego VS. Grace

#31 15-16

Psalm 5:1-8

1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a

Galatians 2:15-21

Luke 7:36 - 8:3

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table.

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. Then she continued 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 creditor 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 sins, which were many, 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?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Our scriptures today deal with the topics of guilt, and wrongdoing, and justifications for our actions . . . and we've heard these stories so often, it seems really easy to see what was done that was wrong and what was done that was extraordinarily kind or just. Ahab wanted some land for gardening, and his wife made it possible. And the speaker of wisdom from God promised justice in the name of the one we turn to for some sense of ultimate justice - God. In this Gospel, there were social and religious mores that were being violated, and Jesus came to the protection of the woman who loved so lavishly. And the Epistle is Paul writing about the source of justification - the source form which all our judgments should come.

Because it is what makes us so human - and motivated so much of our thoughts and feelings - the desire to have some sort of justice - and our right to make those judgments. We teach our children to judge, we watch TV shows about judging, we take sides in arguments, we do not feel safe and secure if we perceive something that someone did which was wrong, and that person "gets away with it." Justice and judging is so close to our sense of God and spirituality - it is entwined with our own egos.

Now egos are important. The most basic definition of ego is: a person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance. And having a healthy sense of who we are can make us kinder, happier, generous ~ because how can we give good things to others if we feel worthless? We have been asked to love others as we love ourselves - suggesting that there is a correlation between our ego, and our ability to offer God's grace.

The problems come when we lose that balance ~ when our egos become the primary basis for our decision making process. And this is what we see so often in life. It is easy to see when someone else is making their personal desires to be the motivating factor for life - and we can respond with such indignance! We call others on their fairness, their greed, their sense of elevating themselves beyond where we think they should be. But it is hard to see how our own egos may be out of balance. Because the ego - our sense of self - is designed to deceive ourselves ~ and others. In psychoanalysis, ego is described as, "the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal

identity." And honestly - that takes real work to keep our ego doing the work of mediation and not of taking over creating illusions of who we are and what we deserve.

Take this story about the dinner at the Pharisee's house, for example. The Pharisee may see himself as being a person of importance, the host, and he is portrayed as judging Jesus' abilities. He has a healthy sense of self - especially seen in contrast to how the woman must have felt about herself. And Jesus' response not only proves to this man that he is far more than a prophet - but is also in the position of forgiving sins - but he also highlights what a life in faith is all about. It is about replacing that ego desire for gratification and justification, with a desire to know and love God.

She is not focusing on herself - she is single mindedly focusing on serving Jesus. Because she responds to his grace - his unlimited kindness and lack of judgment towards her. The Pharisee is judging both Jesus and the woman! And he is taught that the purest expression of the love of God is to not focus on ourselves, but on the object of grace.

So many world religions and spiritual practices focus on learning how to lessen the pull of our own egos, a let go of our own desire to judge. That when we can do more of that, the greater truths of humanity and spirituality and God are revealed to us, and we can understand and experience the joy and love of a life in communion with God.

In Galatians we read, "And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law." Our egos want to be seen as being better than others when we focus on what we can do, what we should do, and therefore others should be doing the same things, because we in our wisdom have figured out that what we do is best . . . we are living in relationship with our own culturally biased awareness and not on the world shattering, ever expanding life of Christ! We are called not be egos which have as one of its subcategories, "Christian"; but we are called to follow Christ and be willing to sacrifice those parts of our egos that do not live in accordance with his teachings.

But we do this all the time. We describe ourselves by our nationality, our family heritage, our wealth, our class, our education, our marital status, and sometimes we relegate our faith to one of the subcategories to describe our egos. And Paul, and the woman with the jar of oil, and Jesus' Disciples, found themselves to be placing trusting and following Jesus as the highest priority in their lives. For the Pharisee, Jesus was still only a possible poor Prophetic option.

This Friday we will begin a new phase in the life of this church. We will be looking at some information given to us by Hope Partnership, and begin discussions as to where to take this church next. And I'll tell you right now, Hope Partnership does not have the answers. I do not have the answers. No one in our church has the answers to the questions of where we are to go and what we are to do next. We are being asked to host the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, to seek God's inspiration with all our hearts and our minds and our souls; and to live for the Grace of God ~ to dedicate our lives to being Christians, not Egos who try to practice a Christ influence faith when we find the time.

For God is good, and loving, and kind, and forgiving, and gracious, and powerful, and inspirational - and knows more than we will ever know - but God wants to share with us all that she is! God wants us to seek him and discover bit by bit what lies just beyond our ego blockades.

Help us dear God, to hear your voice and to follow you with love and gratitude. AMEN