

Outside In and Upside down

COME DINE WITH ME

We are looking at Luke, Chapter 7 v 36-50, 'Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman'

"When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you,

her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7 v 36-50)

Isn't God's Word great? Sometimes a passage just speaks for itself and I am not sure I could add much to such a simple yet brilliant parable.

I wonder though, do have you any secret sins in your life that you can't shake off? Have you ever thought - what difference does it make, it only affects me, what harm can it do? I am pretty good most of the time, I haven't got the strength to give it up, God loves me anyway.

Deep down we are all good at hiding our faults, our mistakes and our judgements of one another and our own sin, even from ourselves.

Unlike the women in this passage, everyone in the village knew she was a sinner, probably the local prostitute, doing something she would not chose to do, but doing it to survive. Even though it came with a lifetime of guilt and shame and made her an outcast in her society.

Thankfully we don't have a big neon sign above our heads, highlighting all our sins and shame, yet! God knows our struggles, feels our pain and weeps with us. We all have a choice though, either to draw closer to God in our struggles, or to drift a little further from God, perceiving God does not love us or care for us.

So what sin I am talking about?

Who would confess to watching daytime TV? Homes under the hammer, Antiques road show or the greatest of them all Come Dine with Me. Hands up those who have watched a sneaky episode - just to see what it was like?

I am sure Ian has as he gave the title for the Sermon today as “Come Dine with Me” The pretext for this daytime show, if you won't admit to watching it, is that four strangers take it in turns, to invite the other three people round to their house for dinner, to cook their favourite meal.

Some may even have a themed evening (so I am led to believe) to make the whole evening more entertaining - with food matching the theme.

At the end of the evening the other contestants mark the host out of 10, the host with the highest score wins a cash prize. However, I have not seen any zeros or all 10's given, most people give scores averaging between 5 and 8! This is information from the research I had to do for the sermon!

There is a danger that, just like the contestants, we grade our sin and others in the same way. All based on how well we feel and how others come up to our own expectations.

However, there are only two scores you can receive from God over sin. You either get zero - the worst of all sinners separated from God or, the perfect 10! Forgiven, because Jesus died for you and for me to take away every sin past, present and future, from us all, to give us freedom and a new life, by God's grace.

Jesus invites us all to come dine with him as we share communion together, maybe for your first time or your 1000th time Jesus reminds us of the new life we are called to live, forgiven and set free.

So often we try and grade ourselves with an imaginary scoring system, I have not been too bad today I will score myself 8 out of 10, when there are only ever two scores loved and forgiven, 10 or 0.

I heard a line from a song recently which said God does not love in pieces, we get him all, God can't and won't withhold any of his love.

Its not to say we won't make wrong choices, mess up daily often beyond what we ever thought we were capable of, and really feel like a 1! But God's word reminds us that nothing can separate us from Gods love, his love for us will always be a perfect 10.

Coming back to 'Come Dine with Me', I find it quite a harmless programme, but sometimes watching it you get insights into what people are talking about - a window on the society we live in.

I guess there is a danger, as Christians, we live in our own little world making it hard for others to come into Gods invited story. When I look around and see your faces, I can see why. We are all loving people, but it takes time to get to know people. In any group we naturally get on with some people better than

others. It's daunting coming into a church admitting there may be something to this God stuff.

Just like the "Come dine with me" contestants people don't really know what to expect.

Jesus gets invited to his own "Come Dine with Me" experience by the Pharisees, but so does an unexpected guest! They all end up being invited in to God's amazing story. As the Pharisee and the Sinful woman join Jesus at the dinner party, both were scoring a zero on the sin scale, even though the Pharisee thought he was closer to a 10 compared to the woman weeping at Jesus' feet.

I think the two dinner guests reflect both ends of the human spectrum. At one end you have the Pharisee so full of knowledge, self-importance and pride! They try to rationalise Jesus' ways and his actions! Today we try and use Science to take away the mystery of God's kingdom and majesty.

The modernistic view is "I think therefore I am" (Rene' Descartes - Philosopher 1596-1650). The Pharisees don't look to Jesus for freedom, they compare Jesus to their own set of rules and lifestyle, and if it does not fit their logic, then it can't possibly be true!

Unlike in the TV show, where the contestants do not know one another. The Pharisees knew who Jesus was, they were not inviting Jesus for a bit of fun, they wanted to test him, and put Jesus on the spot, asking the question - was he really a prophet?

I am guessing it would not have been a small intimate dinner party, there would have been other Pharisees observing, watching, waiting for any chink in Jesus' armour waiting for him to make a mess of things, to prove they were right and Jesus was a mere man. If Jesus was a Prophet, Jesus would know what kind of a woman she was and would not let himself be made unclean by her.

They don't look to Jesus to be set free from perfectionism, other's people's opinions and the requirement to do the right thing in just the right way. Living to the letter of the law, or their interpretation of it is what they want and they want Jesus to fit into their world!

However, Jesus came to turn their upside-down world the right way up.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul” (Mathew 11 v 29)

At the other end of the spectrum was a woman, so caught up her own emotions she may have missed Jesus parable and words of forgiveness, in her sobbing.

Sometimes I forget to look up to see Jesus reaching out to me in my pain, I forget to hear the words - I am here walk with me, talk to me and I will lead you.

Both ends of the spectrum are difficult places to be, but Jesus offers them both hope when He says - come into my story and learn to live a different life. Having our sins forgiven is the first step in our walk of faith.

Hands up those who have had an easy life since becoming a Christian?

So we have no idea how this encounter with Jesus may have affected them both after the dinner, however, Jesus now refers to the Pharisee by name – Simon - making this encounter personal. Jesus only had to say the word Mary for her to recognise Jesus after he had risen. Did calling Simon by name have the same affect?

You may think you are one of the crowd, but Jesus knows each one of us by name and you are invited into Jesus story! If he wanted to, Jesus could send a sky full of angels to convince you, but so often he just says - come walk with me.

Jesus was not given the customary welcome offered to an invited guest. His feet were rough from many years of work and life, dusty with the days grime leaving them a different colour from the rest of him. So when this sinful woman weeps at Jesus feet, I guess expecting to see nice clean set of feet, what does she find? They were still dirty and unkept and as her tears begin to fall, they start to wash the dirt from Jesus feet, leaving streaks across his feet.

Some say she got there early waiting in the wings, desperate to see Jesus, how her heart must have been pounding. She had no expectation of how Jesus would react, Jesus had not turned anyone away yet, would she be the exception? She could not hold her pain in any longer and her tears begin to flow and flow.

Did she stop to listen to Jesus parable in her sobbing? Would she have made the connection as Simon did? Those who have been forgiven much, they also love the most?

Sometimes I forget how sinful I really am! Taking the time to stop and reflect on what I am really like and confessing my sin to a loving God, receiving Gods healing and forgiveness through trusting in Jesus, turning away in repentance from sin so I may dine with Jesus at his communion table.

We don't know how people were affected by this dinner party, this encounter with Jesus over the dinner table. We know for a fact that Jesus said to the lady 'Your sins had been forgiven, you are healed, your shame has been stripped away, crushed by my grace and love.'

It's a promise that does not change and it will last for eternity.

The challenge for me, for us, is how much do I live and trust in the truth of this passage, to allow my world to be turned the right way up?

How did this lady cope when the first client knocked on her door after being forgiven, for the usual services? What was her response? "Sorry I am no longer that type of women my life has been changed, Christ has set me free." Would her reputation stick? Would she still believe her sins were forgiven? I expect she wondered, with no food in the cupboard, had she made the right decision? The memories still linger...

Jesus is the God of second chances, Jesus is our healer and we know what happened to Rahab the prostitute from Jericho when she trusted God, she went from town prostitute to a member of the Royal family. From sinner to a child of God!

Wherever you may find yourself today, from wanting a logical answer to every question or so worn out emotionally you can't lift your eyes to Jesus and hear his message. He loves you, you are His child and He accepts you just as you are.

God invites you into a different story, all it took was one invitation, to draw those from the outside into His story and their world was turned the right way up, sins were forgiven, they were free, bursting with life.

We are going to watch a DVD of someone who was invited into this better story. It happens to be a 'Christians Against Poverty' DVD but it could be someone you have invited to:

Kindle
Pod
One voice
Men's ministry
Women's ministry
A life group
Spot
Alpha.

Amen.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 18th February 2018, by Ian Larkham