

For many people church is not a very comfortable place. For many people this is not a kick off your shoes, let down your hair, come as you are kind of place.

In this building or another like it many people have felt judgmental stares. They have been scolded when their children have been too noisy. They may have seen more frowns than smiles.

This seems a place for "S" words like serious, somber, sedate, stately, studious, sorrowful.

Maybe the dinner party Jesus was invited to began that way also. The host was a Pharisee, a member of the movement of lay people who took their religion seriously. Pharisees know the difference between right and wrong down to the smallest detail. They practiced what was proper, avoided what was improper.

Suddenly the dinner party was invaded by an uninvited guest. A woman whom the host recognized as a sinner came because she heard Jesus was there. She brought ointment, stood behind Jesus, 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.

We are told that the host, when he saw her was thinking, "If Jesus were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him - that she is a sinner."

He was in his mind dismissing Jesus as not authentic. People were saying Jesus was a prophet, but the Pharisee knew that no prophet would have anything to do with such a woman.

Jesus not only knew what kind of a woman was touching him, he even knew the thoughts of his host. So in answer to the thoughts that had never been put into words Jesus said, "Simon, I have something to say to you." A certain creditor had two debtors, one owed five hundred denarii, the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts of both of them. Now which will love him more? Simon answered, I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt."

Then Jesus compared the woman and Simon, one who loved Jesus little, the other who loved Jesus with her whole heart and her every deed.

She needed Jesus. Simon, the Pharisee did not think that he did.

She was convinced of her unworthiness - Simon of his worthiness.

She came worshipping Jesus. Simon was sitting in judgement of this preacher from Nazareth.

She loved Jesus, Simon did not.

Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Simon and his friends began to say among themselves, "Who is this that even forgives sins?" For they knew that only God could forgive sins. But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

For this woman there were only two people in the whole room - she and Jesus. The stares, the unkind whispers, the looks that shouted, "You are not welcome here!" did not matter, only Jesus mattered.

Sometimes as we come into our Lord's presence among his people we do not come with the same determination as this woman. We let little things drive us away; Pharisees like Simon fill our minds more than Jesus who meets us here. Maybe our debt is not large enough, our need not great enough, our pride not shattered enough to cling to our Lord at all costs. We stay away, we do not know the forgiveness, the faith, the peace we so need.

Other times we are like Simon, more concerned about appearances than we are concerned about our Lord. We expect others to come dressed as we are, to speak as we do, to be good enough for our handshake and embrace. We bring our Lord great sadness as we become not a door opening to his love but a barrier separating him from his beloved children.

Jesus received this woman as she was, not ashamed to receive her, a sinner - not embarrassed to be touched by her, loved by her.

And Simon, so concerned about what was right lost out.

Appearances, being right, don't count for much here. Jesus is the only one who matters here. His desire is to receive you here, to forgive you here, and to receive your love and gratitude here. In a sense when you come to this place there are only two in the room, you and your Lord. In repentance, in sorrow, in joy you are received by Jesus here.

Yet Simon is a warning to each of us, not to be judge over our neighbor in need. Clothing, manners, even agreement between us matter not at all next to people being touched by Jesus here.

I hope that each of us will come here week after week with one thought, bringing our every need to Jesus. Come seeking his help, his forgiving, his guiding. In his word, in his supper we will be met by Jesus whom we seek - in prayer and in song we will shower our love on him.