

They both wanted to be closer to Jesus.

Simon invited Jesus to his home to share a meal. Simon was a Pharisee – he was one of a group of men in Jesus' time who were serious about being faithful to God. They were seeking to be faithful to God 24-7. Not only did they follow the Ten Commandments but also applied to their lives more than four hundred other commandments and restrictions that God had given. On this day Simon was serving a formal meal – we know this because Jesus and the other guests reclined at table – they rested on their left elbow and ate with their right hand.

Simon had invited Jesus. Maybe he wanted to learn more about Jesus – at that time to share a meal indicated a connection – a belonging – identifying with someone else. Enemies did not share meals but family did, and friends and colleagues and people identifying with the same group did.

Simon invited Jesus, but from the street came one not invited to that party - a woman who also wanted to be closer to Jesus. She came with her tears and with perfume. As Jesus was reclining at table she moved to his feet – soaked his feet with her tears – then dried his feet with her long hair. She took perfume and anointed his feet. All the while Simon was thinking, “If Jesus were a prophet he would know who and what sort of woman this is – a sinner.”

For Simon that put her outside the circle of his concern the way that today being a criminal, or drug addict, or illegal immigrant, or Buddhist or Muslim or overweight or elderly can for some of us put a person outside the circle of our concern. But Jesus who is far more than a prophet read Simon's mind. Jesus told a parable about big debtors and small debtors and gratitude. Jesus compared Simon who gave Jesus no water to wash his feet and no kiss to welcome Jesus with the woman who bathed Jesus feet with tears and had not stopped kissing his feet. Jesus made it clear who was closer to Jesus.

We are a room full of people who would like to be closer to Jesus. Some of us invest an hour a week, or an hour a month in getting closer to Jesus. Some are ready to let go and clap and shout and even cry to show our

affection for him. And others of us are more reserved – maybe singing a hymn is our greatest show of affection. Still others of us may be able to do no more than be here – not even willing to sing – certainly not willing to clap or shout.

Jesus did accept Simon's invitation. In accepting that invitation Jesus was also saying that he identified with Simon – belonging is a two way street. Jesus was not ashamed to be in Simon's house. Everything seemed to fall apart when Simon sat in judgement of Jesus accepting the woman's affection. Simon wanted Jesus – without her.

There are lots of people who want Jesus but who do not want the people who belong to Jesus. That is why there are so many churches. So many of us think that we can have Jesus without having them. Let me tell you a secret – we cannot. And they cannot have Jesus without us. Maybe that woman had the same thoughts about Simon as he had about her. Maybe she thought, “What is Jesus doing eating with that sort of person, that goody goody hypocritical judgmental Pharisee? What was Jesus doing with Simon? Loving him.

Jesus' love is more than I can imagine. It seems to me that Jesus should love the ones I love and hate the ones I hate - see everyone just the way I see him or her.

That was the sin of Simon – to think that God saw everything just the way Simon did. And when Jesus did not agree the Simon's of his world, the religious teachers decided that the world was better off without Jesus in it. They sent Jesus out of this world and into the world of death.

But this world would not be God's world without Jesus in it so God sent Jesus back again – back from death and into life. Jesus came back to collect all the sinners for himself and take them into the life to come.

All the sinners.

Take Jesus and you get them all.

Take a look around. Jesus loves all these people – Jesus does not think he can do without even one of these people here today.

Go out the door, look around – every person you see Jesus wants for his own. Not one is too short, too tall, too good, too bad, too smart, too dumb to be saved by Jesus.

The next time you are having judgmental thoughts - think about that. Amen.