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Squamish United Church

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Scripture Reading
Luke 7:36-50

Holy Hospitality

I had an experience of welcome last week. An experience of welcome that was rare. A group of clergy gathered in Fredericton New Brunswick and the first thing we were asked to do was to pay attention to one another. We were reminded of Jesus' words "Come and See." And so we told that our primary task of the week was to be attentive. Notice our surroundings, notice the people we are with and the presence of the holy grounding us in all of our days. And in that were asked to see one another.

Just like Simon in today's story we were invited to notice, and listen without judgement or bias. Unlike for Simon that was pretty easy for us because we didn't know each other and we all kind of looked the same. We were all clergy, educated, Christian, in a similar age bracket. So we spent five days telling one another stories, getting to know one another, sharing the gifts and the trials of ministry. We shared success stories, we shared hardships, we were told we were all chosen leaders and we tried to figure out what that meant and how to embrace it. But the most beautiful moment in the midst of the welcome happened when after a few days our welcome became a little more honest. We all let our guard down, and risked a little. We admitted to our new friends and colleagues that some of the time even though on the surface we may look like we know it all, in our heads and hearts we are thinking "Was that right? Is that really true? Is that what I believe? Oh I hope I didn't mess up?"

What we soon discovered was that we are not alone. That there are other people in this world who aren't perfect and don't know it all. We discovered that there are others around us who don't have it all together. We had all known that before but the knowledge even if just for a few days transferred from our heads to our hearts. And ultimately what we were reminded of was the welcome of the holy. That when Jesus says come and see he doesn't first require perfection. He just invites us to come and be who we are.

What we discovered was that we all have moments when we feel like we are faking it. It is hard to describe what it looks like when a room full of leaders get honest. We were all reminded that our gifts of leadership are God-given and that we have a responsibility to use them but amazingly enough in being called out we discovered we are not alone in our humanness. We are not alone in the fear of responsibility at times. We all love what we do and there are areas in which we feel strong. And so that doesn't mean we suddenly give up what God has called us to - but it does mean that perhaps when God calls us to freedom God invites us to be honest with ourselves and one another.

Now, I don't know if my colleagues picked this up when they read this week's gospel but the story seemed to say to me that it's as we bring our vulnerability and our sorrow and our true self to the feet of Jesus we are healed, forgiven, and made new.

The kind of loving welcome Jesus offers is so much more than we are usually encouraged to give.

Simon questions Jesus as he allows this woman to even be at his feet. He wants her out of his home because she has sinned.

Jesus reminds Simon that she has already been forgiven. Jesus lets him know he is well aware of her sins and yet she is the one living in faith and love.

Simon may have put on a good show and a feast for the prophet. But he had forgotten to forgive and love. He had forgotten that he is not perfect and God knows it. He had forgotten to be hospitable and welcoming because for some reason he thought he was above that. Jesus confronted Simon with his judgement - the kind of judgement we live with every day of our lives.

What Jesus offers collides with our judgement. He offers mercy and forgiveness to the one who shouldn't even be in the room. He acknowledges her willingness to be real in her human pain.

Most likely she had already been set on trial and ridiculed in front of her community. She had already admitted her flaws and been forgiven. Jesus says because she has been forgiven she shows great love. Because she had come face to face with her reality she has been set free. Do you see this woman? Jesus asks

“Do you see this woman?” He says to Simon. “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. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, 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.” ⁴⁸Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

What is it to live as one who is forgiven? What is it to forgive? It seems to me it requires something of all of us.

To be forgiven requires vulnerability. It means admitting we have things to change and learn and grow in. And then forgiveness turns everything up side down. It destabilizes us. Because we have to see things differently from now on. We have to accept the changes we need to make, and others have to look at us with new eyes and move on. Look at the forgiveness of Jesus. He sees this woman as faithful. Jesus believes that in being forgiven you are actually changed. This woman has been changed because she has been given a true forgiveness.

I wonder what it would be like for us to live with such holy hospitable forgiveness for ourselves and others. I wonder what it would be like for us to be real about who we are and bring our vulnerability and authenticity to the feet of Jesus. I wonder what it would be like for us to welcome one another in that vulnerability and authenticity - that we might see one another. Cherishing both our gifts and flaws. Acknowledging that we are all human and forgiven. Perhaps if we lived with such holy hospitality we would know what the life abundance Jesus offers is all about.

Last week as the group of us sat with the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick we soaked up his wisdom. But one of the greatest gifts he gave us was being honest about how frightening it was to go one day from being Grayson to the next day being Lieutenant Governor. Suddenly the whole world expected him to have the answers - and if he didn't - well the consequences may be great. We talked about what it was like to suddenly receive the title Reverend and how similar it felt. I know it was the same when I received the titles of counsellor and foster parent. I imagine it's the same when you become Doctor, teacher, lawyer, principle, parent. You feel like you suddenly have to know it. You know in your head you don't and if you are fortunate you might have a person or two who are okay with you still being you. But for the most part like Simon we find ourselves putting on the show. Deciding what's right and wrong, who's in and who's out.

Now there is no question in my mind that sometimes it's just required to look like we know what we are doing. And even more than that sometimes it's required that we step up to the plate when we do know. God has given us gifts and wisdom to use and I believe that is required of us. But I believe holy hospitality is required as well. A honest welcome and forgiveness for ourselves and others.

When we come to Squamish united Church we are offered the opportunity to 'come and see' what God has for the real us in our broken and whole places. So that we together as individuals and community might know what life abundance really is. It is my prayer for us that we will be a community of holy hospitality, that our eyes be open to see one another that we too might live abundantly.

Amen.