

*A little disclaimer first: these bible texts and the news cycle that inspired this sermon involve very ugly things. If this ever feels uncomfortable, please feel free to step out and/or feel free to find me after worship to chat.*

When I was in college, I went reluctantly at first to the Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Arizona. And then I found my people. All of us girls from that group just got together this weekend in Flagstaff to celebrate our friend who just became a mommy after months of waiting for an adoption match. You might have met her beautiful son at our installation. Seven of us came from four different states, with planes and cars and luggage and plans, to get together for the first time since probably before any of us had babies of our own. And for once the lectionary stood beside me as a preacher this week, made my job easier rather than harder to stand here and tell you what good news is today.

But it's going to take us a while to get there, so bear with me. This week was a hard week to be a woman. Our readings this week are full of sin. We hear this week about David and his transgression, taking the married woman he sees bathing, forcing the wife of his military commander into his bed, and then sending Uriah to the frontline to cover up the things he did that let Bathsheba pregnant with her attacker's child. And this is just the first lesson. We hear this week an encounter Luke wants us to know about that takes place in the home of Simon the Pharisee. Jesus is at dinner as a guest, reclining at the table, when someone who doesn't belong appears. Luke makes sure we know three things: she is a woman. She is from the city. She is a sinner.

And let's be clear about two sides of that coin. She's a sinner, so much so that Luke tells us three times over the course of this text. Like she was an expert, she habitually broke norms, she was out of place for her station, gender, and class. But the other side of that coin is this: there is absolutely no evidence in this text that this woman was a whore, a sex worker, a prostitute. What happened here is what happens to most women who are deemed "out of place" by men, by patriarchal cultures like this one, like ours, for taking down their hair, for wearing revealing clothing, for deviance from the male-dictated norm, she was called a slut by generations of interpreters of this story.

And yet it is important that she is a sinner. She is a sinner who infiltrates the righteous man's home to get to Jesus. And notice: she never says a word and we never hear her name. And yet she doesn't pay attention to those norms that tell her she's worthless and she goes in overflowing gratitude to the one reclined at the table. Simon is I'm sure caught off-guard and Jesus explains to this man who seeks to always do the right things and never do the wrong thing about this woman who simply shows her love in what she does. She needs no words. She has the greater debt, and it seems to be that she has

already received forgiveness, grace upon grace. And Jesus asks this most important question of his host: "Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?'"

And the truth is, he doesn't. His eye is trained to not see the divergent, the deviant, the wrong. But Jesus, he does see her. Not the choices or sheer bad luck that led her to his feet, not the father, brothers, husband, or sons who should have been her safety net, not the names, slurs, dirty looks that she'd endured, but Jesus, the Word made flesh, sees her. He says to her "Your sins are forgiven." Not at the end of your life, not when you fall into line, not one you repent and sin no more like he says sometimes, not when you start adhering to what men like Simon would have you do, nope, it's now. Jesus sees her that moment and at the table where she should belong, he declares that she is now one who belongs, one who has a place at the table, one who is now and forevermore called Child of God.

And as comforting as we'd like that to be for us, we are more like Simon the righteous Pharisee than this sinful woman. Justo González writes, "In truth, many of the Pharisees of that time were much like Christians today. We are so constantly preoccupied with doing this or that, or not doing or that, that we forget that the two main commandments are commandments of love." We have made a the law of following Jesus rather than following his great reversal of love. González reminds us what's happening in this gospel story to make it good news: "the sinful woman is praised, while the religious Pharisee is criticized." The one who we would call sinful, shameful, slutty, loose, is viewed as a beloved child of God.

But this story from Luke is useless if it's good news doesn't infiltrate our lives and change us to pour out love like the woman at Jesus' feet. Again I'll say, bear with me. This week was a hard week to be a woman. I'm using a quote from a colleague's sermon prep: Do you see this woman? Jesus asks Simon. And David. And Brock Turner. And us. When Bathsheba's pain is glossed over in only a few verses of lamentation. When a rapist is slapped on the wrist because his future matters more than the utter horror his "twenty minutes of action" inflicted on one woman's whole life. When we say or think things like, How much did she drink? What was she wearing? Why did she go alone? When we tell little kids to hug and kiss grown-ups without asking the child first. When we tell girls that their shorts and tank tops are to blame for assault. And it goes on and on.

Remember my girls' weekend? It was 7 of us total. According to a massive study done by the CDC in 2011, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men will be raped at some point in their life. That means in my group of friends, statistically one of us could be in that group we'd

rather not see. Victims of the rape culture we help perpetuate. That means in this congregation, how many women are here? How many survivors have gone unseen? How many women and girls do you know that have been called sinner and worse for their deviance from norms that Simon the Pharisee would have approved of in our world? Where is our good news for our whole community, for our families, for the children in our Sunday School, Vacation Bible Camp, and preschool in the midst of this week that's been hard to bear as a woman? In the parables of Nathan to David, Jesus to Simon, we catch a glimpse of what God is and always be doing: restoring justice, freeing God people from the crushing burden of sin. That man whose feet were washed walked a cross up a hill to cancel forever the stain of every awful thing we perpetrate on each other and all creation. Good Friday was not meant to be the end of redemption, but Jesus declaring with his own body that sin could not have the final word over human life any longer.

Jesus came to turn the world upside down. And notice, Simon and those at the table question his power over sin, but Luke leaves the door open that those of us who refuse to see this sinful woman and many others still have a chance to enter this banquet prepared for the unseen and deviant children of God. Jesus sees us and asks us to see as well. To read between the lines for Bathsheba's suffering, to watch what the silence of tears do at Jesus' feet, to read again and remember Mary, Joanna, and Susanna and declare that they are not forgotten. To see Pastor Bre, Lorna, Chris, Bev, Barb, Betty, Shirley, Andrea, Cierra, Halen, Hazel and all the women who make this church a place where sinful folks now known as children of God are seen and welcomed. We are, in the midst of this week where being a woman was hard at least for me, a place where sinners and screw-ups are invited to the table, where the righteous and sinner are fed from the same generous hand, where our definition of community includes those who have it all figured out and those who are still not sure of any of this church stuff. This table is a place of belonging and a little taste of salvation. Who is not yet at our table? Whom do we not see? Whom do you call "Sinner" in your own mind? Jesus calls that person Sister/Brother/Beloved Child of God, and invites them to sit at this his table.