



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

February 23, 2025 - Untie, Resist

(Luke 7:36-50)

Breathe a sigh of relief I say, this is a week and a story when it's best to not be a biblical scholar. So for all of us who have that knot in their stomach cuz they don't know all the stories, they can't quote scripture and verse this is our day. We can listen to this story and simply hear it. We aren't thinking about how much the ointment cost, we aren't anticipating that the anointing is foretelling Jesus' death, we don't think the unnamed woman is a prostitute.

Yes, each of the 4 gospels does have a story about Jesus being anointed and the other 3 stories are just before his death, but this one is not. This one has its very own details and teaching - details and teaching that are offered to open us to the radical and inclusive welcome of Jesus. Details and teaching that remind us that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God and love of Jesus. Details and teaching that reinforce the reality that humans are often not as welcoming and loving. Details and teaching that our reaching out to Jesus gets under the skin of those with positions of influence and power.

Maybe I have now introduced parts of those other stories and messed up what we heard so let me retell our story for this morning. There was once a good man called Simon who invited Jesus and some other friends to his house for dinner. They had a delicious dinner. They had lots of interesting conversation. Simon was very happy in the company of all his guests. What a nice evening, he thought. Just then, a woman walked in, carrying a jar of perfume.

"Oh no! Not her!" thought Simon. "I didn't invite her to dinner!" Oh dear. Simon's guests began to mutter and splutter. They knew the woman. They didn't like her. "Look at her!" they mumbled and grumbled. "She's such a terrible person!" They boo-ed and they shoo-ed, but the woman would not leave. She walked up to Jesus and knelt down behind him. Simon and the other guests groaned and moaned. The woman opened her perfume jar and poured some out on Jesus' feet. Simon sneezed and wheezed at the smell of it! Then the woman gently rubbed Jesus' feet with her hair, and cried great big tears which fell on his feet too. Simon's eyes nearly popped; his jaw dropped! "Look at her now!" he fussed in disgust. His other guests were shocked, oh how they talked! "Look at her! Why doesn't Jesus stop her?" they fizzed and quizzed. Then Jesus spoke up, not muttering or spluttering, mumbling or grumbling, groaning or moaning, fizzing or quizzing. "Look at her!" said Jesus. "Yes, look at her. Stop your rudeness, can't you see her goodness? What a treat, that she washed my feet. Don't moan and groan, see the love she's shown!" And he said to the kind woman "Go in peace".

I hear 2 kinds of resistance in this story. I hear the resistance of the Simon and the guests who aren't Jesus and the resistance of the woman.

Simon and the guests are put out and resist the presence of the woman. I get that. I know when I am entertaining I do some planning and preparation. I set the table. I extend invitations. I think about where people will sit. I hope that meal and the gathering goes well. And I am remembering a little dinner with and out of town friend who was visiting. We sat down to eat and my really new upstairs neighbor came bursting in the front door. Smoke detectors were going off, she wasn't familiar with her house, she couldn't reach things and she was trying to get to an appointment. While we were glad to lend a hand, her unanticipated arrival disrupted our meal in a significant way.

How much more unsettled and disrupted was it at Simon's house. All those religious Pharisees who loved God and worshiped together. All those men having a meal. And this night, this night they have been able to get the new rabbi to join them. Rabbi Jesus has been creating a stir in the neighborhood for sure. He is a faithful, practicing Jewish man but he doesn't stay in his place. This night they have him for dinner. They can ask questions. They can talk. Who knows what they will learn. Maybe they will get in on what Jesus is doing? Maybe they can get him to join in their way of being? So much possibility, curiosity and hope.

Except a sinful woman enters in. Simon's plans, the conversation, the flow of the evening are disrupted. It could have been a brief thing. She could have been ushered out quickly and they could return to their feasting except it didn't go down like that. It was Simon's home but Jesus spoke up. Jesus knew full well how this was messing with Simon and he took the opportunity to teach and invite Simon into a new way of being, Jesus' way of radical and inclusive love.. Jesus honored the woman. Jesus valued what she did. Jesus went so far as to call out Simon on his lack of welcome and hospitality.

Awkward dinner party moment. How things were imagined is not how it is played out. This is the truth of Jesus' way and God's resurrecting love. Our human systems of power, control, violence are broken open by sacred love. Our human social ladders and constructs are knocked down by sacred love. Our self deprecating and sense of unworthiness are wiped away by sacred love. Sacred love resists all the limits and fears and controls. Humans, empire, power hungry seek to arrange and manipulate into predictability and repeatability. God and Jesus respond to those barriers and constraints with resurrecting and transforming love. People of privilege grasp tight to the patterns and systems that support their comfort. Followers of Jesus resist those constraints.

Followers of Jesus are like the woman who entered Simon's house where she was not invited. She saw Jesus there and she knew that with him there was healing, forgiving, rearranging and life. She felt the glares and took the risk of going where she was not wanted. Jesus was there to welcome her. Jesus was there to encourage her. So it is for each and all of us. We are welcomed, loved, embraced by the radical and inclusive love of Jesus. There is nothing about us or our past, our brokenness, our faults that stops him from loving and accepting us. Yes, there are cultural and societal stories that tell us otherwise but they are not the truth. We can resist those stories and like the woman take ourselves to the feet of Jesus, to give thanks for his love and to be healed and restored by him.

That's our first work. To know our place with Jesus. To know our embrace by Jesus. Grounded in that we can do the next part of our work. Announce, proclaim, practice making room for all of God's people. To speak out against the lies that some are not worthy. To welcome the stranger.

To challenge the language of exclusion, racism, sexism, nationalism. To let others know that even if the Simons of the world resist and exclude, there is the truth and way of God which welcomes.

Beloved, there is a lot of exclusion and cruelty loose in the world. The voices are loud, powerful and seeking to constrain the love and welcome of God. On the communion table and spread through the sanctuary are baskets of fabric tied in knots, symbols of our current time and what we are facing. But now, just as God has been through the ages, there is resurrecting love loose and uncontainable. It unties the knots, it opens doors, it eliminates barriers. It calls out for people to trust that love and join in spreading it. If you want to commit to be part of that ministry of love, of loosening the barriers or making way of all of God's people to be welcomed you are invited to come up, in your own time, and take a piece of knotted fabric. Hold it, feel the knot, feel the barrier and then untie it. Know and experience that the knot is not permanent. Hold on to that fabric and tie and untie it as often as you need to remember, to trust, to be changed, to resist. God's active. God has agency. Knots are real but love wins. Amen.

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