

A Fabulous Spectacle

Proper 6, Year C - Luke 36-50

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, June 16, 2013

Lord, Take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

I know the scene sounds a little familiar, but can you picture it? One of the religious movers and shakers in town included the *fabulous* young traveling prophet, Jesus on his dinner party guest list. When Jesus got there and had laid back to eat, a woman came up behind him and began washing his feet. I don't know how she had gotten in there, but apparently, she was *not* the kind of woman that a religious person would want at his dinner party. Maybe before anyone could ask for her invitation, she just kind of barged in and made a bee-line for Jesus, anointing his feet, washing them with her tears, kissing them and drying them with her hair, making a real *spectacle* of herself. The other guests, all the fabulous, *right* people in town, were totally stunned. They were *mortified*. They were *scandalized*.

Now, if this had been the *right* kind of woman, it would have *still* caused a stir. Remember back during Lent, when John told a similar, if not the same story, it was Mary, of Mary and Martha fame, doing the same thing in her own home, and even she got quite a bit of the wrong sort of attention. But this was *not* the lady of the house. *This* woman was *that* kind of woman. You know what I mean – nudge, nudge, wink, wink – she was a *sinner*.

Now, maybe she was a thief. Maybe she was a con-artist. Maybe she was a prostitute like most preachers *like* telling the story. All Luke tells us is that, as they looked down their noses at her there at Jesus' feet, with her hair all down, and her eyes puffy with her crying, and kissing that young man's feet right there in front of God and everybody, all the fabulous, right people in town called that woman a sinner. Of course, for the fabulous, right people, this sinner might have been a widow that lived on the wrong side of the tracks and couldn't wash and dress and follow the rules, like the *fabulous* folks. Or maybe she was divorced. A woman couldn't divorce her husband for any reason, but a man could divorce his wife if she mismanaged his household, or burned his toast, or if he was one of the *right* people, and just got tired of looking at the sinner. It really didn't matter. All the fabulous, *right* people knew who she was, and they knew that she was *that kind* of woman, and they knew she was making a spectacle of herself at *their* dinner party.

At some point, maybe days or weeks or *months* before, Jesus had done or said something that touched her life. She had followed him, looking for an opportunity to show her gratitude. She had followed him right on into the middle of the mover-and-shaker's fabulous dinner party. She expressed her love and gratitude to the one who had done something wonderful for her. And you know what? I don't get the impression that she cared one little bit *who* saw her, or what the fabulous, right people thought about it.

Over the back of his hand, talking "to *himself*," you know, so *everyone* could hear, the mover-and-shaker made a snide little joke: "If this guy's such a great prophet, why can't he tell when he's being fondled by *that kind* of woman, you know – nudge, nudge, wink, wink – a *sinner*?" I suspect *that* got quite a chuckle from the other fabulous, right people at the table.

"Ahem," said Jesus, "I've got an amusing story for you." "Oh, do tell," said his fabulous host. "There was a banker who had loaned money to two people," Jesus said, knowing that only one subject gets people's attention quicker than *that kind* of woman. "One fellow owed \$50,000, the other owed \$50. When neither of them could pay, instead of throwing them both in jail, he wrote off both loans." "So," Jesus asked, "who will love the banker more?"

The fabulous host responded, "The one who owed more." "Bingo," Jesus said. "Now look at this woman. You see, her sins have been forgiven, and she knows it. What'ya think? I think it's pretty obvious to anybody who's paying attention that she's truly grateful." "On the other hand," he continued,

“when I got here, you didn’t even greet me properly as a guest, much less like one of your fabulous friends.” “I guess the one to whom little is forgiven, just doesn’t get it.”

I think I’ve told most of you by now that I didn’t grow up Episcopalian but with those folks that make the Baptists look like a bunch of liberals. Anyway, when I was a kid, in our church on Sunday evenings we would frequently have what was called “testimony time.” Folks would stand up and tell about their lives, and how they had been changed by Jesus. We even had special speakers come in from time to time and tell *their* conversion stories. I can remember as a little boy being pretty sure that I really wasn’t ready to be a Christian. From everything I heard, I figured that before you could really know about Jesus, you had to get mixed up in drugs or drinking or running around with “that kind” of people. Then you had to hurt all the people that love you, and maybe even go to jail for doing something *really* big. And I just didn’t have those kind of credentials!

And maybe that’s a problem many of us still have. Most of you grew up like me, swaddled by the love of Christ from the cradle, and surrounded by the Church from your mother’s arms. We say in our hearts, “I never really did anything really wrong.” “I never killed anyone.” “I never stole anything.” “I never cheated on my taxes or my spouse.” “I’m not *that kind* of person.” But the real twist to Jesus’ story today is that, when it comes to how much we have been forgiven, there is *no* one who owes just a little. Our gossiping and our back-biting and our petty lies, are just as onerous in the eyes of the almighty, all righteous, all *seeing* God, as anything the woman in this story may or may *not* have done. Our “little” sins are just as damning as any great big *testimony-time* sins. And God’s forgiveness, over and over and over again, is just as profound. The difference is that the woman who crashed the fabulous party *knew* who she was, and *knew* she had been forgiven, and *knew* who she loved for such great mercy and grace. So she made a spectacle of herself, while the fabulous, *right* people, you know, like you and me, sit quietly by.

We all owe our Savior for absolutely everything we are. We are each of us *that kind* of woman, *that kind* of man, you know – nudge, nudge, wink, wink – *sinner*s. Regardless how fabulous, and how right we may pretend to be, we owe more than we can ever *hope* to repay. Our *only* hope comes from the sure and certain *fact* that Jesus Christ is indeed the one “who even forgives sins.”

Maybe it’s time we made a real *spectacle* of ourselves about it.