

What's the craziest thing any of you have done that paid off?

What drove you to do it? Why did you "take the plunge" and decide that the possible outcome outweighed the risk?

That risk... that danger, be it physical, personal or social... it is very real and in many ways puts the boundaries on what we will do, not what we can do. And it is when we overcome these invisible boundaries that we feel the greatest release.

For me: I was in my bedroom sitting on my futon back in Iowa, knowing what I needed to do... having known for the better part of a year, and having had an inkling for well over 2 years... I finally said, out loud, that I felt called to be a pastor... I had resisted it for so long thinking I knew better. God didn't fit neatly into any of the boxes I had made while growing up, and being called to serve that which I didn't fully understand, or necessarily know...

Honestly it was liberating. I didn't weep like the woman in this story. But I did tear up. I sat there in my room for a long time after I said

it. Alone in that room, those words lingered in the air, and it felt profound, terrifying... and right.

While I didn't weep like the woman, I can see why she did. That moment, alone in an apartment in Iowa, I made a slight transition from being a pharisaic Simon, to a weeping stranger at the feet of God.

Simon the Pharisee is an uncomfortable figure for me when I read this story, and frankly this whole story hits me in the spiritual gut every time I've read it. Because I can't help but see myself in Simon, and all I want to do is slap him and say: "Don't you see?!" "Don't you get it?!"

There is so much going on in this text

Humility vs pride

Sinner vs A righteous person

Named vs Unnamed

That last one is what I struggle with. Named vs Unnamed... I can't think of a time in my life when I was ever truly a stranger. I've been in strange places, but in all of those places, I could walk anywhere

I wanted and at worst someone would ask if I needed directions. I've been welcome at parties that I had only learned about at the last minute... I've always had a name, and an identity that people on a very basic level have no problem accepting.

But this woman... we literally know nothing about her other than her gender and her nature... which I will emphasize is the same nature that you and I share... we are beggars before God, sinners one and all. And that isn't an empty phrase, or a hollow platitude. It's a unifying reality of who we are, as people before God, reminding us of why we need God.

This woman, who does not have a name, but because of how the story ends, I want to call her Grace. I'm tired of saying "this woman" or "that woman" because even this far after the fact, she deserves the respect and dignity of being acknowledged.

She wouldn't have had the same benefits I've had with being able to walk around freely without question or abuse... But Simon could.

She couldn't commit even the slightest sin without society clamoring over itself to condemn her... But Simon could.

She couldn't have spoken a word to Jesus in such a polite company as a dinner party with a Pharisee... But Simon could.

Simon and Grace are not two sides of the same coin, they are in separate worlds with very different rules and expectations. And for Simon, though I'm sure he could write a full list of her sins, the greatest one that she was committing this day was interrupting his plans. How dare she accost HIS guest, in HIS house...

Would you allow someone fresh off the street, whom you know has a bad history, to just walk up to a barbeque you are having with your friends?

...

You might be uncomfortable. You might be concerned. Or in the case of Simon, you might be indignant and mad. But Simon wasn't just judging Grace, he was testing Jesus. He was seeing if Jesus would fit

into the boxes he created before this meal. Because SHE was in her box and that wasn't about to change.

The stakes couldn't have been greater. This was a society where a "sinful" woman could be cut out of society, or accused of a sin and stoned in the lands beyond the city. And yet, there she is... weeping in a Pharisee's house... at the feet of a man who no one was absolutely sure about yet.

Whatever her sins were, however small or large, she wasn't going to get forgiveness from society. And yet there she is...

She had given up her control in this moment. She knew something that Simon, in all of his studies and rigorous adherence to "how things should be done" couldn't tell him. She was vulnerable because she believed in what Jesus MIGHT be able to do for her.

But that doesn't paint the whole scene. No, because that only explains what made her show up. But she was crying. Inside her soul, she knew that the man whom she was anointing and paying homage to, wasn't just a great prophet. Wasn't just a good man... she knew that

Jesus somehow, someway held the keys to everything. And she was driven to make herself a fool for Christ as St. Paul later calls us to be. Grace was ahead of the curve on this one.

Simon had no idea that there was anything else going on besides a breach of decorum.

He judged her for her show of emotion... her devotion... he likely wouldn't even dare to consider that it might be worship... because that would be crazy...

Jesus, in his compassion and mercy, didn't stop her from doing what she was doing. And instead, he addresses the sins that Simon is committing in that moment. But he does it through story, which is both the most subtle way to make a point and the most profound.

Two debtors, one small, one great... both unable to pay... who's more thankful?

Simon can't even answer this question with confidence because he is starting to see what Jesus is getting at. Only, he can't bring himself to truly understand who it is in front of him.

Still not understanding, Jesus spells it out for Simon. Look at what she is doing – All of the things you should have done for me as your guest... and she does it not as a host, but as a servant stranger...

Who hasn't had a moment where you can't find what you're looking for and your mom says "did you really look?" and sure enough... it's right there.

Like I said earlier, this story is powerful for me every time I read it because too often I'm Simon, and too rarely am I Grace. It is too easy to fall into the pit of sin and snap judgments. To convince ourselves that proper etiquette and behavior is most important. This is sin when it gets in the way of us experiencing God.

I've been in churches where they strategically send the children off to Sunday school right after the announcements and greeting. There may be logistical reasons, but its also pretty clear that those churches treasure their order and quiet during service.

I am in the other camp. I love the kids being in service, and once I had my initial heart attack when Kathy told me about the bucket... it's become one of my favorite things I do here.

Tears aren't wrong.

Grace's tears probably had many causes: A life of being forgotten. Of being abused and left behind by everyone she's cared about. Of fear at having entered into this strange house without invitation. And thanksgiving... Again... this man whom she was crying on... she somehow knew that he held the keys.

She wasn't crazy... she wasn't deranged... and she wasn't out of line... she was moved by faith in a world that only wants what it's always had.

And then Jesus does something really cool and dramatic... and my love for theatrics enjoys this bit.

He turns towards Grace and speaks to Simon. He sees her. Truly sees her and he is letting her know that at that moment, she is front and center in the heart and mind of God. And then he forgives her.

Before this moment, she had faith that Jesus might be able to forgive her sins. And just like Abraham before her, her faith is what made her righteous. And I like to believe that Simon's hard heart softened after this ordeal... and I believe that from Simon's perspective this was an ordeal... An upper class socialite's nightmare... A dinner party gone terribly wrong...

That same grace though, that was offered to Grace, that which she received through her faith, was also being offered to Simon... and is still being offered to us now.

For us to cry when we confess our sins, or when we take communion, or when we have those powerful moments of the divine in our lives... it's not going too far. The thing that Simon couldn't see, and his position in society blocked him from seeing, is that he and she were on the same level before God. Her debt may have seemed to be more but Simon couldn't pay back his debt no matter how small it was.

God uses examples of true repentance, like in this story, to show us the sins that we perhaps don't wish to see in ourselves. It's a good time

to ask ourselves which sins do we find socially unacceptable... and which ones we might be fine with and not know it...

Jesus gently prodded Simon to see the error of his ways. He is gently prodding all of us each and every day because he cares for us. He doesn't want any of us to be forgotten like Grace had been. And because of her quote-unquote foolishness, her example has been teaching the faithful for millennia.

Society and traditions still lump large swathes of people on the outside of "normal", and when they break the rules, the "rest" of us are uncomfortable with it. But God ALWAYS chooses the person that society would otherwise write off in order to do the amazing thing.

So I call you to be foolish this week. (allow for a chuckle if it happens) Weep if you feel so moved, for the gift of faith that we have been given. For the example of Grace and Simon. For the blessings that we have been given, and will be given to us, either in this life or the next.

We are formed into community through the Holy Spirit, forgiven our sins through Christ and will always be beloved children of God... no matter how great our debt, the one who holds the keys has forgiven it all. And so, let us all hope and strive for a moment in our lives when Grace weeps just like when Grace wept.

Amen.