

“A tale of two sinners”
Brentwood First Presbyterian
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Scene 1 A woman rains tears, one response to God’s forgiveness is emotion

It is last Sunday, thousands of miles away, in a village called Valle Nuevo. Not a village like Brentwood with its SUVs, shopping centers, paved roads with street lights, and fine stores and restaurants. Valle Nuevo is a Kekchi Indian village in rural Guatemala, on land no one else wants. Because it is not good for agriculture or anything else. It has no running water, no water hole, no public school, no sewage treatment plant, no plumbing of any sort, no medical doctors, and no one eats more than one meal a day. Because there is not enough to go around. It is during worship last Sunday that we see her. Four and a half feet tall, dark skin, a colorful skirt and blouse. She is about 35 years old. Bad teeth. And it is during worship that we hear her. She starts praying out loud. And then she starts crying. I do not mean softly sobbing. She is wailing at the top of her lungs. And I do not mean for 15 seconds. I mean for a full 20 minutes. Because of the language barrier, I never know exactly why.

Jesus was in town. Jesus was well known by now. It was very prestigious to have someone as well known as Jesus in your house. So Simon asked him over for a meal. He went to Simon’s house and sat down at the dinner table. Just then a woman of the village, a broken woman, having learned that Jesus was a guest in Simon’s home, came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet.

But open displays of emotion disturb us. They intrude upon us. They interrupt us. So we distance ourselves.

Scene 2 A Pharisee distances himself, some of us prefer a “distant” God

When Simon sees this, he draws his face up into a scorn. Can you see his face? He says to himself, “If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him.”

I feel uncomfortable with the Kekchi woman’s 20 minutes of crying. I have trouble focusing on her pain not knowing what caused it. Maybe some of you were also raised in households where little emotion was displayed. Maybe you were criticized by your family or your friends when you cried. Maybe the church in which you were raised favored an image of God as a distant creator. Maybe your childhood church talked about Jesus, but did not truly explore the image of God feeling our pain while putting on the human clothing of Jesus. Such a theological world view, that of a God who creates us and then leaves us “home alone,” would have us think of God as distant and uninvolved. Maybe our childhood church had a Trinitarian view of God, but since then our culture has distorted the image of an incarnational God who cries with us.

But scripture tells us Jesus wept for Lazarus. And Jesus wept for Jerusalem. Jesus weeps.

Scene 3 Jesus forgives both the woman and the Pharisee, Jesus does not discriminate, neither do we

I titled this sermon, “A tale of two sinners.” I would like you to ponder the question, “Who is the greater sinner, Simon or the weeping woman?”

The woman who wept comes in off the street. She is not invited. But Jesus lets her wash his feet with her tears. We are told she is a sinful woman, but we do not know what she did to deserve the title of sinner. The predominately patriarchal culture of the last 2000 years assumes she was member of the oldest profession. But we do not know that. This is not supported Biblically. There are many other ways to be broken. She could have been ... one of us.

Jesus said to him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Oh? Tell me.”

“Two men were in debt to a banker. One owed five hundred silver pieces, the other fifty. Neither of them could pay up, and so the banker cancelled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful? Simon answered, “I suppose the one who was forgiven the most.”

“That’s right,” said Jesus. Then turning to the woman, but speaking to Simon, he said, “Do you see this woman? I came to your home. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn’t quit kissing my feet.” To the woman, he said, “I forgive your sins. Your trust has made you whole. Go with joy.” What is interesting to me is that scripture never says she asked for forgiveness. But Jesus forgave her anyway.

There is a knock on my door while I am studying. I am always being interrupted. The time and location is Auburn University 36 years ago. I open the door and an upper classman almost jumps into my dorm room. He asks me, “Are you saved?” I am 18 years old, and no one ever asks such questions in an Episcopalian household. So very innocently I respond to his question with another question. “Saved from what?” Saved from what indeed! There is a limit to the amount of unconditional love a human can give. But is there a limit to God’s unconditional love? Is there a limit to God’s mercy and forgiveness? Would a loving, forgiving, merciful God banish us for bad deeds? Or even bad creeds?

Who is the greater sinner, the broken woman or Simon? Jesus tells us in his parable of the banker that for both the slate is wiped clean. For God’s forgiveness is the great equalizer.

Conclusion

A Kekchi woman crying uncontrollably during worship. Simon’s scorn. We do not deserve God’s love, mercy, or forgiveness. But through his words, Jesus invites us. Through Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s resurrection of Jesus, God shows forgiveness of sins

even as we commit them. Maybe we can cry. Tears of sorrow because we ourselves have trouble forgiving and inviting. Tears of sorrow mixed with tears of joy, for what Jesus did 2000 years ago. For all of us. Not just those pure in deed and creed. Because God's forgiveness is the great equalizer.

Glory be to God. Hallelujah. And the people say,