

June 13, 2010 Pentecost 03 C Lectionary 11

2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15
Galatians 2:15-21

Psalm 32
Luke 7:36-8:3

A dinner party in first century Israel was not like our dinner parties.

In those days there was little in the way of public welfare programs and there was NOTHING in the way of refrigeration. For both reasons, it was understood that the poor of the community might stand along the walls or in the outer court waiting for the end of the meal when the scraps were handed out to the penniless and hungry. It was practical- leftovers would only rot. But it was also a magnanimous gesture. The well-to-do could gain a reputation for charity by giving such a dinner. So a dinner like this one would have an audience.

And the people dining put on a show for each other and for that audience. They all embraced the custom of sharing clever riddles, word puzzles, or stories with a moral. There was an expectation that the guests would speak. You had to bring something to the table. It was education, entertainment, even a bit of social jockeying- make a good showing and you might become the darling of the social set and receive even more invitations.

Call it competitive schmoozing.

The lesser people of the street got to watch the other half having dinner and discussion. A dinner was a First-Century talk show. Jesus was invited to be on THE VIEW.

The type of story Jesus offered would have fit right in and was more or less expected. So Jesus sang for his supper. He told a parable. One person owed a debt of 500 denarii, the other owed 50.

Let's do the math.

Assume a denarius is one day's wages. Assume a six day work week. Four six-day weeks is 24 days, so 24 denarii earned in a four week month. That's 48 denarii for two months, so a debt of 50 denarii is just over two months income. Now put that into terms from your own life. Two months plus two days worth of income. Get a number in your head.

That's a debt of fifty denarii. For 500 denarii it's 500 days wages. Again using a six day work week it's 83 weeks of wages. That's more than a year and a half. Something like a year and seven months.

In rough numbers one person owes just over two month's income and the other owes just over 19 months income. Do the math.

For those really keeping score this denarius was the daily wage for a common laborer. A first century minimum wage. If you currently make more than a common laborer, your number might be high. So for accuracy you should be basing your math on the current minimum wage. \$6.15 per hour for a large employer \$5.25 per hour small employer. From a MN. Dept of Labor website. At the lower wage it's \$63.00 per 12 hr day \$1512.00 per month at 24 working days.

50 days 3,150. 500 days 31,500. Even the smaller debt is not small. It's not like paying someone back for buying lunch. Even the smaller debt is substantial.

On with the parable. The two debts are both forgiven. Jesus asks which debtor will have MORE love for that generous creditor?

“ 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly."

Jesus might have told the one about the two rabbis who walked into an oasis, but he told the parable of two debts because this woman, this outrageous, generous, emotional woman has captured everyone's attention. She didn't stand quietly at the outer edges waiting for the scraps. She crossed the social divide. She crossed many divides. Women were not supposed to be out of the house without a male chaperone. Women only touched members of their own family. DECENT women kept their hair covered- we see this custom still practiced today. Showing the full head of hair was provocative, racy, undignified. Touching feet was undignified.

Dinner was suddenly AWKWARD!!

Jesus accepted her loving, grieving, gratitude. He saw her. He forgave her sins. Her sins were many, the text says. Forgiveness meant everything to her.

It COST her to lavish this balm on Jesus, but she gave no thought to the cost. She did not spare any expense either in money or in social standing. Well, really she had no social standing. She had nothing to lose.

Simon the host did have something to lose. Only at the end, we learn that Simon did not do such a great job of welcoming Jesus. No water for his feet, no oil for his hair.

I think Simon was doing the math. He wanted to gain some stature by having the popular, CONTROVERSIAL rabbi, Jesus- maybe he was taking a walk on the wild side- but not TOO wild. Better give Jesus a cool welcome to show the conservative elements that I haven't fallen for this guy. Simon was figuring out what advantage he could get from Jesus without too much cost.

Jesus poses a math question and Simon proves he is all about the math by answering it based on the numbers.

You and I do the same. We come to church and we make our deals with God and hope we come away with enough forgiveness to cover the debt, but without giving up too much of our autonomy. We don't give ourselves in love to Jesus.

I want to calculate just what to say and how to say it so you all have the same broken heart the woman had, and I can't find the formula. We receive the forgiveness of sins as real and as important as wiping out a debt, and we don't know how to celebrate.

Both debtors were forgiven. Both were spared the pain of debtor's prison which was just as harsh for a small debt as for a big one.

We receive from Jesus forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, and we have a modicum of thanks.

Here's another Math problem. "As I was going to St. Ives I met a man with seven wives, and every wife had seven sacks and every sack had seven cats and every cat had seven kittens. Kittens, cats, the man, his wives, how many were going to St. Ives?"

Who is buried in Grant's Tomb? What color was George Washington's white horse?

It's a trick question folks. God is not interested in the math. Jesus gave everything-poured out his life for the stinking feet of this stingy messed up world. The broken hearted really know what this means.

This woman had seen Jesus before. She was overwhelmed. In HIS kingdom she was a person of value, not just a commodity bought and sold by others, not just a nobody shoved to the outer wall to be safely ignored.

Whatever price the world has set for you, Jesus had paid the debt and then some.

You are beloved of God. You are free. You are forgiven by Jesus. That's worth kissing his feet, and pouring out your dearest possessions in his honor