

Sermon Proper 6 Pentecost 3 Year C June 13, 2010

Our readings today are all about power and hospitality. Our first reading from Kings is about King Ahab and his wife Jezebel who abused their power to steal the vineyard of Nabboth. In their attempt to acquire his vineyard that was adjacent to the palace of the king, Jezebel forges documents in the name of the king, get scoundrels to bring false accusations against Nabboth that get him stoned to death. Through the misuse of power they lied, stole and murdered to acquire what they wanted.

In our second reading Paul is responding in his letter to the Galatians against false teachers who also abused their authority to misguide the people that were being converted to Christ, by insisting on the imposition of Jewish law in order to become full members in the Body of Christ. Paul argues that we are justified by faith and not by the law. Specifically, these other teachers were insisting that in order to become a full member in the Christian community necessitated circumcision which was required under Jewish law. Paul refutes these ideas and says rather that I have been crucified with Christ...and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God. It is through Christ's death and resurrection that we are justified before God....the ultimate act of hospitality and grace. Our salvation comes through Christ not by adherence to any law or action on our part.

In our gospel we see an act of hospitality demonstrated at the home of a Pharisee by an unlikely guest who came uninvited. It was the custom for guests coming into your home to be offered the opportunity to wash their feet before sitting down at table. The Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner did not offer this hospitality. It is an unnamed woman who offers hospitality to Jesus.

This unnamed woman who anoints Jesus' feet with her tears is sexually demonized. She is called "a woman of the city" (meaning prostitute), a "sinner." Theologian Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza points out that most prostitutes in the cities of the New Testament world were impoverished and forced into this type of livelihood as a result of their marginal status in a patriarchal society. She claims that "all categories of sinners were in one way or another marginal people who were badly paid and often abused."

Yet this "woman of the city" is the one who offers radical hospitality to Jesus in the story — and it's not even her house! She crashes the dinner party because she believes she has a place at the table. Her empowered, embodied action makes the host nervous. Simon, a caricature of respectable religiosity, is upstaged by this woman, "a sinner" whose name we do not even know.

At the end of this gospel we hear of Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna, three named women among a host of others who were

disciples of Jesus and provided for the needs of the community, using their money and resources to fund Jesus' ministry. Again, it is the women who provide hospitality and model service for us in the scripture.

So what are we to make of these scripture passages in our time? As always our readings can prompt questions for us. If we consider the issues of power and hospitality we need ask ourselves, how do we use our personal power and influence on a day to day basis. Do we use our power in service of those in need? Do we respect the inherent dignity of each and every person regardless of status, race, or gender? Do we appreciate the inherent difference among others?

Secondly, how have we experienced hospitality and in turn how have we extended hospitality to others? I believe that providing hospitality is one way in which we check our use of personal power. To be truly hospitable means to make ourselves vulnerable in the presence of others. Like the unnamed woman who made herself vulnerable before Jesus, being hospitable makes us vulnerable by placing the needs of another before our own comfort.

May we be aware of how we use our power and be willing to extend hospitality to those in our family, at work, in our community and to those different from ourselves who may lack personal power in our world. Amen.