

June 12, 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Luke 7:36-8:3

by [Mihee Kim-Kort](#) in the [May 25, 2016](#) issue

When I gave birth to my first children—twins—my mother came for six weeks to help us shell-shocked new parents by cooking, cleaning, and sharing the burden of caring for two babies. While she was there, I spent a lot of time thinking about her. As I nursed, burped, and changed the twins in an endless cycle, I was transported to another time. It was like an aerial view of my parents' lives when they arrived here in the United States with me, when I was one year old.

I saw them navigating not only parenthood but a whole new language and culture, trying to find a balance between making space for what they understood as their former home and what they knew would be home for us from then on. I observed what it was like to toil and love and cook and make a life for the sake of your children. I saw my parents lose sleep worrying and wondering if we would make it the next day. I could see what it was like to carry around such a mixed bag of emotions all the time—fierce love for your children, grief over the loss of a life now so far away across seasons and oceans, and a determination to make it all work out.

All these things came to mind during my postpartum recovery, as my mother spent hours massaging my hands and feet. Our lives overlapped and blurred together. It's amazing what one sees when life shifts so dramatically.

When I read this week's passage from Luke, I take an aerial view and pause at each angle. My perspective shifts from the disciples, to Jesus, then to Simon the Pharisee, then to the bystanders, then finally to the woman who washes Jesus' feet. I wonder what has shifted in her life so that she sees Jesus in such a way that motivates this outpouring of love and thanksgiving.

It is enough to make her presence a significant teaching moment. "Do you see this woman?" Jesus asks Simon. Luke tends to frame stories of Jesus' interactions with those on the periphery of the community in terms of *sight*. The leper sees Jesus before receiving healing; Jesus sees the faith of the friends of the paralytic; Jesus sees his disciples; Jesus sees the mother in a funeral procession for her son. It may seem obvious, but to understand the purpose and substance of Jesus' ministry

requires a certain kind of vision beyond the physical.

The Pharisee sees it, Luke tells us: he sees this woman, whom he calls a sinner, washing Jesus' feet with ointment, her tears, and her hair. But apparently he does not really see, because Jesus proceeds to tell him a parable about debt and forgiveness.

One way to read this text is to focus on indebtedness and on the contrast between the Pharisee and the woman. The disparity is clear as we see the different positions and postures of the two people, the Pharisee at the table and the woman at his feet. The Pharisee sits at the same level as Jesus, while the woman is bent over and crouched down at his feet. Jesus points out that it is this woman, though, who understands what it means to receive grace and express it. Pedigree and standing—religious, social, political—are irrelevant when it comes to love poured out. Though the parable Jesus tells points out the quantitative difference in debt, what's really meaningful here is the immeasurable expression of love.

A friend who does research in Calcutta tells me about an Indian custom she has witnessed frequently on her visits. When certain people enter another person's home, they are greeted by the host—who bows before the guest and places their forehead on the guest's feet in a gesture of love. I can only imagine the dirt and grime on bare feet, feet that walk the streets of a city where there is regular flooding.

This image shifts my reading of Luke's text a bit. Rather than seeing this as an example of forgiveness and gratitude, I see it as an image of radical hospitality. The woman's act of love is contrasted with Simon's lack of genuine hospitality, and Jesus reciprocates through these generous words: "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

I see it in this light also because of the final verses of the reading, the first verses of chapter 8. In a way it seems the loving act done by this woman has given Jesus new life, as he goes on his way "proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God." Luke also lists those who are with him, including the names of several women.

We often forget the women. *Do you see this woman?* The way she throws off cultural expectations and norms by giving fully of herself in the moment? What if our hospitality were rooted in this kind of love and fearless intimacy, a reckless abandonment that allows for the giving and receiving of salvation and wholeness?