

"THE INVISIBLE ONES"

May 6, 2018

Luke 7:36-40

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus over for a meal. He went to the Pharisee's house and sat down at the dinner table. Just then a woman of the village, the town harlot, having learned that Jesus was a guest in the home of the Pharisee, came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said 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."

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 canceled 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 provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume. Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal."

Then he spoke to her: "I forgive your sins."

That set the dinner guests talking behind his back: "Who does he think he is, forgiving sins!"

He ignored them and said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

My older brother this week gave me permission to tell you the story of his imaginary friend, Booko. My brother, an only child in 1955, longed for a playmate, but my parents were, I guess, a bit slow in complying. Enter, "Booko."

Booko lived in the garbage disposer in the family house located on S. Monroe St. in Denver. Before one of my parents could flip the switch on the disposer, they had to call Booko's name to make sure he wasn't in there at the time. A sliced and diced-up Booko would not be a pleasant catastrophe to explain to my parents' trusting one year-old son.

I can't describe Booko or tell you much about him, and neither could my brother the other night, but our parents used to tell me that Booko went everywhere with his creator: He sat with Jackson at dinner and had a special plate set for him along with the rest of the family; he went into the bath with my brother, and even had his own bath toys. They napped together, played together, slept together, and rode around together in our dad's prized silver and black Austin Healey.

Booko wasn't visible, but try telling that a one year-old who lives with an imaginary friend and you'll get nowhere. Did any of you have an imaginary friend or a child with an imaginary friend? It's really quite a sweet memory to have.

My brother took my obvious cue the other night and replied to my inquiry as follows: "I don't remember much. Booko was around for a while and then you took his place. I think that was for the best." Aww. What a nice thing to be prompted to say!

Our invisible ones.

Last week in Nashville, I stayed at a Hampton Inn near downtown. As you might recall, I was there for a ministry training for trainers of boundary trainers. That's a southern mouth full, if ever there was one! My hotel room was sparsely appointed, but the bed didn't make my back creak in the morning and the faucet in the bathroom didn't leak, so I guess it was alright on balance.

I am a neatnik when in a hotel or a motel; I probably don't keep my own house as picked up as do I my rented room. I guess it's psychological with me; I don't want the housekeeper to think poorly of the three-nights tenant they most likely never will meet.

When it came time to pack up my things, I dutifully left \$15 in the envelope left discretely in the room for housekeeper tips. I never met them; I never thought much about them, as long as my bed was made, and my bathroom towels repositioned on the racks when I returned to

my room at the end of the day's session. Sometimes, I get irritated with housekeeping, when they come and knock on my door at inconvenient times or if they haven't made it to my room when I am ready to reenter it. I particularly like the housekeepers who make animals shapes out of my towels. They're the best!

The invisible ones.

I used to go into the jails and prisons a lot. It was part of my job, not so much as a court judge, but in the days when I defended people accused of crimes or convicted and sentenced to confinement for them. The scariest prison I ever went to was Walpole, in Massachusetts, but Old Max at Canyon City rivaled it in the "creep me out" department. These older prisons are dark and musty. The cellblocks are scary and hopeless. When those huge metal doors close behind you and in front of you and you are waiting for your client to be brought to you, it's all a person can do to keep from sweating through their courtroom suit jacket, let me tell you.

The invisible ones.

I once had an experience that to me, was moving, but to the inmate was life-changing. I was meeting a female prisoner for the first time. She was incarcerated in medium security and she bore all the indicia of a tough gal who had been in and through the system a long time. She was nervous to meet me, I later learned. For me, she

was another in a long long list of prisoners with whom I had exchanged a wary gaze and an uneasy dialogue.

In this particular prison, the visitors were not allowed contact visits, meaning, we had to see and speak to each other across a glass partition. No hugs, no handshakes, no danger. It helped keep the visitors safe, the guards less anxious, and the prisoners less apt to receive contraband.

I did not yet know this woman. She was about 10 years my junior, but in street years, she was way, way older than I. I couldn't greet her as I would a lady on the street, so I simply put my hand up on the glass, fingers spread out. She looked at me, and then sauntered over my way, and then slowly, tentatively, put her hand up on her side of the glass to match mine.

The invisible ones.

The woman, unnamed in Luke's gospel, is invisible in her society. The *Message Bible* identifies her as a harlot—a prostitute, or at the very least, a promiscuous woman. The NRSV Bible labels her a "sinner," meaning one who is not ritually clean or temple-ready. That could mean a lot of things. Suffice it to say, the nameless, faceless woman of the gospel story is one of the invisible ones of the day, a nobody. And yet, Jesus takes the time to thank her, to look at her, to really look at her, and to bless her.

The woman with the jar of ointment for the weary traveler's skin, the woman who cries with the emotion of the moment and lets her tears drip on the hot and sore feet of the Rabbi Jesus, this socially invisible woman becomes the anointed and blessed one of the entire story. Not Simon the Pharisee who hosts Jesus for dinner. Not the disciples who look on in wonderment. Not even Jesus. The woman. The invisible one. The invisible one who alone knows what Jesus needs and willingly gives her perfume to soothe his blisters and his weary bones.

The invisible one. I recently read that "everyone has a basic human need to be *seen*, that is, to be understood and valued." We learn other's names so as to demonstrate that they count. I learn all your names so that you know you are *seen* by me. I learn all your children's names not to show off that I can do it, but so that they know me, and so that they know they are not invisible to me—they are not the invisible ones of the church as they often are, bothers and distractions that should not be heard in church or seen to get in the way of the important business of religion.

I was *invisible* in my growing-up church. I was *invisible*, and I was "*just a girl*" and I was "*only a child*." No child in any church I call home shall ever be invisible to me. Can you say the same? Jesus asks Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

The minister who was quoted as saying that every human has a basic need to be seen amplified their statement with the following:

You can't fake truly seeing another person. People know if you really see them or not. When you truly see them, you find their note, their vibration, their connection with God, and you dance with them right there.

Jesus asks, "Do you see this woman?" He is speaking to the one who is comfortably and publicly seen, a Pharisee, a leader in his religion. No one pushes him into a corner; no one walks by him on the street and fails to pay him deference. But this woman? Not so much. Not so much. We don't see this woman. We can't pray her name. We can't wear her sainted image around our neck. She is the invisible one.

And why would we want to, anyway? She is at worst a prostitute and at best a ritually unclean street woman, one denied the temple life. Martin Copenhaver reminds us of our dilemma with these words:

If you see this woman, actually see this woman, you might need to move beyond the stereotypes and preconceptions. You might have to stop simply labeling her a sinner and then leaving it at that. You might have to relate to her as a *person*, as one soul to another soul. You might have to respond to her with compassion.

You see, it's rather simple. Simon the Pharisee only sees what kind of a woman she is. Jesus does not see a *sort* of woman; he sees *this* woman.

He puts his hand upon the glass.

He waits for the housekeeper in the hallway and hands her his tip in person, thanking her for soothing his aching feet and back with a clean bed and crisp sheets.

He lets no friend, no child, no street person, not even someone who lives in the garbage disposals of life, be invisible.

Do you see this woman? Do you see this man? Do you see this child? The invisible ones, invisible to us perhaps, but never to God. Jesus sees the man of the street and loves him completely. Jesus sees the woman in the prison cell and loves her completely. Jesus sees my brother, who has long since grown up and lost the magic of having an invisible friend, and Jesus loves him completely.

We can't see God and we can't see Jesus and we can't see Spirit, but then again, we can see them everywhere if we will just *look*, if we will just *see*, if we will just *love* the invisible ones.

May It Be So.