



Grace-filled Hospitality

In the readings this week, we encounter God's generosity in pouring out gifts of forgiveness, salvation, and healing. Such grace-filled hospitality inspires response, and we take up our role as faithful disciples, pouring out kindness and justice, and empowering the ministry of others, as we have opportunity.

Focus Scripture: Luke 7:36—8:3

We can only speculate how the unnamed woman in this story came to know the grace-filled gift of forgiveness that Jesus poured out on her. The gospel does not include an account of any previous encounters with this woman, specifically. We are witnesses, however, to the hospitality that she extends to Jesus, pouring out her love, literally, through the gift of the costly ointment.

According to the custom of the day, the dinner guests in this story would have been reclining at tables in a courtyard of Simon's home. They would have removed their footwear upon entering the house. The woman, who invites herself into the scene and begins to kiss and cleanse Jesus' feet, could have entered the courtyard from the street. The story focuses on the hospitality that she extends to Jesus – hospitality that Simon, even as host, does not. The scene sets up an implied challenge to

Jesus' identity: Simon wonders how a prophet would not know "what kind of woman" she is.

When it appears that Jesus responds to this unspoken challenge, the point is made that he is indeed a prophet. Insofar as prophets are those who recognize faithfulness, Jesus recognizes the faith of this woman. When Jesus uses the example of two debtors being relieved of their debts, he contrasts the behaviour of Simon with the behaviour of the woman in how they respond to God's grace and forgiveness. Jesus explains the woman's actions as a response of gratitude.

Only the gospel of Luke comments on the grace-filled hospitality of the three women named in 8:1–3. It is thought that Mary Magdalene (who is *not* the unnamed woman of the previous story), Johanna, and Susanna received healing from Jesus, and were part of the group of women who travelled with Jesus and the other disciples. These women offered financial support as well, empowering the ministry of the gospel.

Having an abundance of material goods does not prompt Ahab and Jezebel to acts of hospitality toward Naboth, as told in the story from **1 Kings 21:1–10, (11–14), 15–21a**. Just as the woman in the passage from Luke responds out of faith, Naboth

also responds faithfully. By refusing to give up his land, Naboth is upholding the covenant between the Hebrew people and God that is embodied in the land.

The psalmist, like Naboth, seems threatened by deceitful plots and lies. Just as Naboth's understanding of the goodness of God gives him courage to defy the king, the writer of **Psalm 5:1–8** takes courage in the steadfast love of God.

Like the unnamed woman in the passage from Luke, Paul also experiences God's grace-filled hospitality poured out upon his own life. Paul, who had experienced political power as a Pharisee, relates in **Galatians 2:15–21** his discovery of the power of vulnerability and love that those who have faith share with Jesus.

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We encounter God's grace-filled hospitality in our lives, amazed at God's generous outpouring of forgiveness, salvation, and healing. We respond through our own ministries of hospitality, so that we may welcome and forgive others, thus extending the gift of God's grace and empowering ministry. In what ways does your community of faith extend grace-filled hospitality to those whom Christ places in your midst?

