

Sunday September 13th, 2020

The Loving Forgiveness

Luke 7:36-50

This passage shows us two ways of living. The Pharisee represents those of us who centre their lives around being good and doing good, and the woman represents those who centre their lives around devotion to Jesus.

Centring your life around doing good and being good is an admirable thing. We all know of people who have done great things throughout our country and world for the sake of others, and we also know people who are just good, salt-of-the-earth folks who get on doing good in their day-to-day context. Centring your life around being good and doing good is admirable, but it does have a downside. If that's where you find your identity and purpose, it can be very disconcerting when you fail. To feel better about yourself you subconsciously compare yourselves to others (at least I'm not as bad as so and so) which leads to pride, which kills love. This is exactly what has happened with the Pharisee in the passage. He is a good person, but his focus is on the behaviour others not himself (comparison), he thinks he is better than these people (pride) and in the end he is shown to be lacking in love, failing to even welcome his guest, Jesus, properly.

Centring your life around devotion to Jesus doesn't begin by committing to do good and be good. It begins by letting go of comparison and pride to recognise that there are many times we've failed (which is true for everyone) and looking to Jesus to receive forgiveness. You'd think that making life about being forgiven would lead to people behaving badly. In fact, the opposite is true – when people realise that the world isn't just about keeping the rules or doing good, but is about grace and forgiveness, they are freed up to love fully. This is what we see in the woman in this passage. She focuses on Jesus, confesses her fault (not worrying about others) and receives forgiveness and is filled with a love that puts the Pharisee's good works to shame.

We all hold guilt and shame and regret (even if it is guilt over the fact that we don't feel very guilty!). May we bring this all before Jesus, receive his forgiveness and go forth in love.

Questions for group discussion

1. What stood out to you in the message?
2. Do you find yourself focusing on the behaviour of others rather than your own?
3. Is there such a thing as good behaviour and bad behaviour? If so, where do you draw the line?
4. How can you respond?