**Rev. Melissa J. Claxton
Luke 7-8, March 5, 2023
Jesus and the Outcast, Outsiders, and Outlaws
Simon, Do You See Her?**

We continue through the Lenten season by looking through the book of Luke and how Jesus out to the Outcast, Outsiders, and Outlaws, inviting them back into a relationship with God and using them for the work of sharing the gospel with the world.

Part of our human nature seems to be categorizing people and placing a worth on them. It’s always been the case. All throughout human history, we’ve decided who’s important and who is not, who belongs and who doesn’t...who should get a second chance and who shouldn’t. Two thousand years ago, this is exactly what Jesus was dealing with. There were people who were considered valuable, important, worthy...and then there were those who weren’t. Jesus turned that upside down as he reached out to the outcasts, outsiders, and outlaws.

Today, on this second Sunday in Lent, we continue to look at how Jesus through the lens of Luke’s gospel. Luke, more so than any other gospel, tells us how Jesus lifted up and included the most unlikely people.

Last week, we started this series by looking at how Jesus lifted up the lowly. We only used two of the characters of the Christmas story...Elizabeth and Mary. Both were considered lowly. Elizabeth for being childless and Mary for being poor, but the reality is that the Christmas story was chuck full of people the world considered lowly...stinky, smelly shepherds the angels invited to see the Christ Child...Anna and Simeon in the Temple...these were all lowly people lifted up.

We continue this series by looking at how Jesus reached out to the marginalized. Let us pray.

**Sermon:** I thought we’d start with a definition of what we mean by marginalized since we’re talking about how Jesus lifts up the margnalized. The marginalized is defined as *“those groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political, and economic) because of unequal power relationships across the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions.”* That’s a mouthful, right? These are people who are discriminated or excluded in one way or another mainly because they don’t hold equal power.

You don’t have to spend too much time watching the news to hear something about marginalized people...at least not in my lifetime. It’s always front and center. It’s always right there. The last several years, the focus has been immigrants and refugees; it’s been on the LGBTQ community - particularly transgender folks; it’s been on people of color, especially with the rise of white nationalism. These are marginalized people – people who are discriminated against or excluded in one way or another mainly because they don’t hold equal power. Someone else is making the rules.

These all fall under the heading of Social Justice issues, and we as the UMC believe that’s the work of the church. Most of these issues are addressed in the social principles of the United Methodist Church. These are injustices that we as a denomination believe need to be corrected. Another social justice issue that the UMC is working on is women’s equality.

**I just learned that March 8th is International Women’s Day (IWD.)** IWD dates back to 1909. It’s an international day observed by countries across the globe set aside to focus on women’s rights, bringing attention to issues like:

Gender equality...In 2022, the Pew Research Center analysis showed that women earned an average of 82% of what men earned. In the 21st century, women earn almost 20% less for the same work as their male counterpart. Women make up only 10% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. And in the UMC, women make up around 29% of clergy, but there are only two women assigned as lead pastors in the top 100 churches.

Reproductive Rights is another focus of IWD...it’s one of those contentious issues in the U.S., with a majority believing a woman should have the right to choose what happens to her body...I right to say I don’t want to have a baby...access to birth control.

Another focus is violence and abuse against women...1 in 6 women have been sexually assaulted. That means every one of you knows someone who has been sexually assaulted. And here’s the worst part, over 2/3 of rapists get away with it. And when women do stand up and defend themselves, they tend to go to jail serving longer sentences then men for the same crime. The average sentence for a man who kills his female partner is 2 to 6 years. The average sentence for a woman who kills her male partner, even in situations of severe abuse, is 15 years.

These are the statistics, and these are the injustices that IWD is striving to bring into focus so they can be fixed.

As I was thinking about this, I was thinking about my grandchildren. Early in February, we welcomed a new granddaughter into the world. Kennedy. That gives me three granddaughters and I want a world for them where they are not marginalized...where they are not paid less for the same amount of work or violently attacked and abused, and if they are, that there will be justice for them. That’s what I want for my granddaughters.

In the ancient world, women were among the marginalized in society. In many cases, they were little more than property passed from father to husband to son. If the husband got tired of her, he could cast her aside. He could divorce her because she burnt dinner or he didn’t like the way she kept the house...or he simply got tired of her and didn’t want her around anymore. Hopefully her family would take her back in, because if they didn’t, she had very few options when it came to supporting herself. If she couldn’t find another man to marry her, her only other options were prostitution and begging.

 She couldn’t hold a job. She couldn’t own property. She could have money that was given to her, but she wasn’t allowed to offer testimony in court. Her word meant nothing. This is how bad it was...As part of each morning’s ritual, Jewish men would prayer, *“Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has not made me a woman.”* Thank you for not making me female. There are Jewish men who still pray that prayer today.

Yet, when we turn to Luke’s gospel, we find that Luke is always lifting women up. In Luke 4, we read about Jesus’ first healing according to the Gospel of Luke. The first person Jesus healed was Peter’s mother-in-law. Now granted, she did get right up and start serving them, but....

In Luke 8, Jesus healed the 12-year-old daughter of Jarius, a synagogue leader. But before Jesus could even get there, he was touched by another woman who needed healing...a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Because of her condition, she was an outcast. She couldn’t sleep in the same room as her husband. She couldn’t sit on any of the furniture. In her touching him, Jesus should have been furious because she would have made him unclean, but he wasn’t. Instead, he healed her and restored her back into community.

Luke goes even further in lifting up women. He talks about the women who surrounded Jesus and supported his ministry financially. They’re listed in today’s passage. Mary Magdalene (a woman Jesus healed from seven demons), Joanna (the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household), Susanna, and many others. These are women who had means available to them and they were disciples of Jesus. They might not have been called disciples, but they were.

Then, in Luke 10, we have the story of Martha and Mary. Martha is living into the role of the traditional woman. She is in the kitchen working diligently to prepare food for the men and she’s angry because Mary is not helping. Instead, Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening, drinking in everything he has to say. And when Martha confronts Jesus with this, Jesus sides with Mary, stating that she is right where she needs to be. He lifts her up.

In today’s gospel, we have another woman. Luke doesn’t give her a name, but he tells her story. Jesus had been invited to the house of Simon, the Pharisee. He had been invited over for dinner. And we read that while reclining at the table, a woman walks in.

When we think about Jesus sitting around a table with Simon and whoever else is there, it can be easy to picture a modern banquet table surrounded by chairs...upright with feet under the table. This is how Davinci painted it in his famous painting *The Last Supper.* However, Jews and Romans didn’t sit up at a table like we do today. Instead, the table sat low to the ground and was surrounded on three sides by three low couches with cushions on them. The one in the middle is where the host would sit with a couch on his left and one on his right for his guests. The front of the table was left open for people to serve the food. A typical table sat nine people...three on each couch. And in ancient Rome, men and women did not usually eat together.

They would sit on these couches, leaning toward the table with their head supported on their left elbow so they could eat with their right hand. Their feet were actually behind them, pointed away from the table. So, when we think about Jesus washing the feet of his disciples in John 13, the disciple wouldn’t have even had to move because their feet would sprawled out behind them. It also explains how easily it would have been for this woman to get to Jesus’ feet.

She comes in and right away, everyone knows that she is a “sinful” woman. In verse 39, it states that *“when the Pharisee who invited him saw this, he said to himself, “if this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”* Jesus uses that as a teaching moment and tells a beautiful story about forgiveness, but I like what he actually to Simon. ***“Simon, do you see this woman?”***

**Do you see her?** Not her gender. Not her past or the sigma that followers her around. Not how she’s dressed or what family she comes from or her past or any of those things. Do you see her? Do you see past those things and do you really see her?

***I wonder how different the world would be if we were willing to look at people the same way Jesus did.***

The woman who had been bleeding for 12 years...Jesus didn’t see someone who was disgusting or unclean; someone who would contaminate him. He saw a woman in need of healing and compassion and grace.

Jarius’ daughter...she wasn’t someone disposable as children were in the ancient world. Jesus saw in her a beautiful child full of potential.

Mary, sitting at his feet. She wasn’t someone who had stepped out of her lane, someone who was less than, someone who wasn’t supposed to be learning because she wasn’t smart enough. He saw an intelligent, inquisitive woman that had a right to learn.

This woman, kneeling at his feet with tears pouring down her face and dripping off her chin, her hair down. Jesus didn’t see a prostitute or a “sinful” person. He saw past the shell, past her brokenness...he saw her. ***Simon, do you really see this woman?***

Lent is a season of self-reflection and repentance. We spend time reflecting on our own lives, asking ourselves if we are on the path God is calling us to be on. Are we living life the way God is calling us to live it. **Are we seeing people the way God is calling us to see them?**

***I wonder how the world would be different if we were willing to see people the way Jesus saw them.*** A few questions to ponder this Lenten season:

 Who are the marginalized in my community?

 How do I see them? Do I actually see the person or do I see the other stuff?

 How is God calling me to seek justice and love kindness in that place?

 Do you need to repent...to change direction in the way that you treat other people?

**Jesus lifted up the marginalized. We need to be doing that as well. *Let us pray.***