

**Proper 6C  
Luke 7:36-8:3  
June 13, 2010**

**Simon had a case of the “just-a”s. A bad, bad, horribly bad case. It was so bad that he’d gotten used to it, almost forgot it was there. Like an old ache in your knee or ankle. The “just-a”s just showed up one day, and Simon was their victim.**

**You could see it in the way he welcomed Jesus of Nazareth into his home. I mean, really. Who was Jesus anyway? Just a preacher, an itinerant, a vagabond. Just a jumped-up rabbi thinking he knew the ways of God. Sure, he was getting a lot of attention in the villages and towns, but Simon knew who he was dealing with ... just a two-bit prophet, which is no kind of prophet at all.**

**So why bother making a fuss when Jesus came to dinner? There were so many more important people included on that night’s guest list. Dignitaries, public officials, other students of Torah who knew better than to make a laughing stock of themselves by hanging out with tax collectors and sinners. Why, it was quite big of Simon, really big of him, to invite Jesus over at all. After all, if you inquired closely into how Jesus spent his time, you might discover that he was ritually unclean. He had probably touched a corpse, or walked into a Gentile house, or failed to wash his hands in the right way.**

**He might be a sinner himself, someone who had actually put himself outside the law by his actions.**

**But better not to ask. But no reason to go to any great lengths for him. He was, after all, just a trumped-up preacher from tiny little Nazareth.**

**Yes, Simon had a case of the “just-a”s all right. Just a preacher, just a yokel, just a poseur. That’s how he saw Jesus. So since Jesus was “just-a” all those things, there was no need to give him any special greeting. No need to wash his feet, oil his skin, or give him the ritual kiss on the cheek. Why, he should be happy Simon had invited him to dine at all.**

**So there they were, reclined, as was the custom, on couches, head facing inward toward the table, lounging on the left arm, with the right hand free to pick and choose among the olives and bread and fish and grain presented at the table. Their feet would have been stretched out behind them, toward the walls, or maybe even a colonnade, open to the garden, open to the gate, open to the street beyond.**

**Because here she came, out of nowhere, and Simon’s case of the “just-a”s turned into a raging fever of horror. Here came this woman – a sinner for sure! She ran into the dining area, weeping, weeping, great buckets of tears rolling down her face, great rivers of snot pouring out her nose, sobbing brokenly with that ragged, painful hiccup you get when your world has ended, and you just can’t get the tears out fast enough.**

**She clung to Jesus’ feet as they extended toward her there at the end of the dining couch. In horror, she saw his feet glistening wet with her tears, so she uncovered her hair and began to wipe them dry, still sobbing, and wiping, and kissing them over and over again. And then she opened her little alabaster box and scooped out a handful of thick, rich ointment and began to massage his feet – still weeping, still kissing, still sobbing.**

**And Simon’s “just-a”s ramped up to fever pitch. She was just a woman. She was just a sinner. She was just a ... well, you KNOW what sort of woman she was. She was just a fool, a silly fool, to act this way. She was just a trespasser, barging into his home. She was just a laughing-stock, here, at this very dignified, very important event.**

**Simon didn't even have to say it. It was written all over his face, what he was thinking. "If this man were a prophet – not just a poseur – he would know who and what kind of woman this is ... that she is just a sinner." And Jesus, who WAS, in fact, a prophet, answered Simon's silent complaint. He told a parable: two debtors, two debts forgiven, and one, whose debt was huge, was grateful. The other, whose debt was small, was not.**

**And then Jesus let Simon have it for his horrible, horrible case of the "just-a"s. "You gave me no water, but she – just a sinner – has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she – just a sinner – has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she – just a sinner – has anointed my feet with ointment."**

**Simon had missed it. Completely missed it. Because of his terrible case of the "just-a"s, he had missed the whole point. That yes, he HAD a prophet in his home. THE prophet, the FULFILLMENT of the law and the prophets, was eating at his table in his house. But because he thought Jesus was just a nobody, he missed the grace of God that had entered his dwelling.**

**And because he thought that woman was just a bad, sinning sort of woman, he missed the fact that he, Simon, and she, the bad lady, were completely equal in the sight of God. That whatever wrong they had done, great or small, was equally offensive to God. That Simon's prejudice and stinginess of heart was as vile a sin as anything that naughty woman had ever done. And that God loved them both – equally. And forgave them both – equally.**

**Jesus came into that woman's life and everything, everything changed. She saw him, recognized him, and realized exactly where she stood with God. Despite everything she had ever done, God loved her. And forgave her. And so she could not have welcomed Jesus into her life any more extravagantly and thankfully than she did that day.**

**On the other hand, Jesus came into Simon's life and nothing changed. Nothing changed at all. Simon saw him, but Simon did not recognize him. Simon did not realize that the complete embodiment of God's love and God's forgiveness had chosen to dine at his table. Simon did not welcome Jesus into his life, but treated him as an afterthought, as a barely welcome guest.**

**And I wonder ... when someone comes through the doors of this church, to feast with us at *this* table, are we more like Simon, or are we more like the weeping woman? Our banner out there above the name tags quotes a line from the Rule of St. Benedict – “All are to be welcomed as Christ.” And I'm sure they are. The question is, are they welcomed as Christ was welcomed by Simon, or are they welcomed as Christ was welcomed by the woman?**

**Because it's easy to welcome all as Christ was welcomed by Simon. To do the minimum, give them a place at the table, but never engage, never encounter, never discover the magic and mystery and gifts of the person who walked into our doors.**

**It's easier to have a case of the “just-a”s. The “just-a”s give us a free pass. Oh, well ... it's just a student. They'd be happier at Canterbury anyway. Oh, well ... it's just a backsliding Baptist. They won't really like our formal kind of liturgy. Oh, well ... it's just a kid. There's probably a parent right behind them. Oh, well ... it's just an older woman, sitting by herself. She probably only wants to be left alone.**

**And then what's even worse, is we turn the “just-a”s on ourselves! Well, I'm just an old person. They wouldn't want to talk to me. Well, I'm just a young person. They probably think I don't know anything. Well, I'm just a worshipper here ... it's not like I run any committees or anything. Well, I'm just one of that same group of people who do everything around here, and they probably don't want to do anything to help ME out.**

**And all the while, Jesus is walking right past us, sitting right next to us, praying and singing and communing along with us, and if we don't say SOMETHING, do SOMETHING, well then, at the end of the morning, Jesus will have left the building.**

**Look at the person next to you. Go ahead, look them in the eye. Do you see them? Can you really see who is sitting next to you today? Look harder. It's Jesus in their eyes. It's Jesus looking back at you, hoping you will see him for who he is and welcome him.**

**Because every person in this place this morning – the old-timers and the new visitors, the little babies and the wise grandmas, the stressed-out and the blissed-out, the sketchy and the secure, the employed and the unemployed, the right wing and the left, the white and the black, the strong and the weak – every person here is no less than a vessel of Christ.**

**And we do not know what grace, what wisdom, what love, what knowledge that person sitting next to us, or in front of us, or behind us, might have locked up in the little alabaster box that is their heart,**

**Maybe they have come here today, waiting only for an invitation to pour it out upon us – fragrant, soft and cool.**