

Pentecost C-3, 2007

June 17, 2007

Title: Jesus and the Unspoken Rules

(Summer Sermon Series: Jesus in the Nitty Gritty)

Luke 7:36-8:3

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, who offers life, forgiveness and new beginnings!

Let us pray. Lord, send us the people who need you! Keep us focused on being vessels for your grace. Form us more and more into your image, so that the power of your love flows through us.

Jesus in the nitty, gritty! That's the overall theme for our summer sermon series. We've had summer series when it was real clear what the theme was. Last years attention was to King David....so when you come to church you knew where the pastors were heading.

But Jesus in the nitty, gritty. Frankly, these may not be words all Of us understand. You won't find them in the Bible. We may have 500 different meanings for nitty, gritty.

Is nitty, gritty a reminder of summer's heat?
Is nitty, gritty a call to attend to the dirty places?
Will passers by be drawn in because they saw that sign
Out front. Think we're calling out a revival of
A rock band—the Nitty, Gritty Dirt Band?
Could it be that we just didn't have a good overarching theme
For the summer so we admitted that in an indirect way? Jesus in the
Nitty, gritty is kind of like saying Jesus, here, there and everywhere.

If you read over the Gospel lessons for these 9 weeks they cover a section of Luke's Gospel where Jesus is dealing with the issues of the heart....It's as though right before us is the very thing we need the most, central to life, not only what we need to know but the implications of Jesus' action for us.

So here's a sub-title to go along with Jesus in the Nitty Gritty:
God in Christ isn't through with us yet because he
Wants us to be so wrapped up in his love that when
We live it we are moved to be deeper and fuller disciples

Who don't settle for less. And if that ain't where the nitty, gritty is, then we ain't alive.

So today: Jesus and the Unspoken Rules.

Here are a series of nitty, gritty jokes I read recently.

Knock-knock
Who's there?
Why.
Why who?
One question at a time please.

What do Attila the Hun and John the Baptist have in common? The same middle name.

What do you call cheese that doesn't belong to you? Nacho cheese

Finally, a man shows up with his dog at the office of a theatrical agent, hoping this agent will take them in as clients. He claims the dog talks and wants to demonstrate it.

Fido, what do you call the thing on the top of the house?
The dog responds, "Roof!"
The agent is not impressed. Stands looking at his watch.
The man says, Hold on! Fido, what is the texture of sandpaper?
The dog responds, "Rough!" Again, the agent is ready to escort them
To the door.
Hurriedly, the man says, "One more chance. You'll like this. Fido,
Who was the greatest baseball player of all time?" And the dog
Seems to say "Ruth!"

So the agent disgustedly throws them out the door. As the dog and the owner go tumbling down the side walk the dog looks up at the owner and says,
"DiMaggio?"

Surprise. A sudden upending of the usual order of things. This story of Jesus with the sinful woman who says nothing, but does plenty is that kind of surprise. It's a true comedy. For in a comedy, some one who is estranged or lost or left out is restored to community.

The agent of that restoration is Jesus!

The woman isn't supposed to be in this home. She isn't supposed to
Be gripping the feet of Jesus. She isn't supposed to be bathing him
With ointment. She's just a sinner. That's all we know about her.

But look what happens to her—she's the debtor weighed down with
500 denarii of life stuff; she's stuck in the nitty gritty of her
sin, she doesn't deserve to be here—but what happens to her,
this nobody, this compromised person is restored to life.

Your sins are forgiven!!
Your faith has saved you. Go in peace!

Aren't those the most precious words to hear?
To hear the Lord Jesus liberate you from you!
Take off the shackles that have defined you!
Grant you a new, a brand new future.

That what was once a bolted and shut door is opened wide
And you can walk through alive, in love in touch!

Knock-Knock.
Who's there?
Free.
Free who?
Free to be!

Yes. Free to be. Look at what she did. Adorning Jesus with everything she
had. Not only displaying the hospitality the host had failed to offer, but also,
and especially, weeping at the foot of this gracious Jesus.

“Whenever” writes Fredrick Beuchner, “you find tears in your eyes,
especially unexpected tears,
It is well to pay close attention. There may be where God in Christ
Is most speaking to you.”

This freed to be woman is weeping to express her gratitude for a love that
gives life, a Jesus kind of love

Such weeping demonstrates that Jesus has gotten hold of you! Such
weeping is a door way to peace. “Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which

Are many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.”

When my mother died, opened up as we are by the
Death of a loved one, much came flooding back. I wept in
Thanksgiving for such things as the time she, in poor
Judgement, allowed this then teenage son to drive her
New 1967 Galaxie 500 to school. While racing out
Of the Lee Edwards High Student parking lot I collided
With another car. The left front panel was creased.

What did I do? Tried to hide it. Parked it so she wouldn't see it. When the
big confrontation came she made sure I knew her disappointment, but more
than that she made sure I knew she'd forgiven me.

What if she'd only offered the first part—disappointment.
No restoration, a false peace, a wall between. It was as though
That day I was free to be!

W.H. Auden writes, “I know nothing except what everyone
Knows, if there God dances, I should dance.”

And God is dancing.

Knock-knock.
Who's there?
Trans.
Trans who?
Transforming love.

Simon the Pharisee doesn't get it. What a tragic figure. Could he possibly
have been wrong about God? Does he seriously prefer this woman be kept
in her sin? What will her transformation mean to him? What's a risk here
for Simon? Why isn't Simon weeping and dancing because Jesus
Gives this woman a different future.

Is it possible to be that blind. Will Simon join in the dance, be captured by
the surprise?

We don't know.

But what we are invited to know, to discover is the toxic power of blind and
smug religion. Joyless with a tiny and tidy view of Jesus.

There are unspoken rules which do violence, they bind us
To a lesser God. Restrict us from the stream of grace which
Flows from the heart of Jesus.

Here are a few that hold sway, become stumbling blocks.
Rule #1 THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS!

We get used to un-transformed living. We expect it. We begin to
Believe about our community, about ourselves that
People are stuck where they are. Nothing much happens.
Such rules leave no room for God to work!!
Communicating a restrictive view of the future.
When just-the-way-it-is holds sway there are
No people weeping, turned around, restored,
Touched by Jesus. No real hope

Simon says to himself: "If this man were a prophet, he would have known
who and what kind of woman this is who is tending him!" In other words:
THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS!!

Rule #2 SETTLE. KEEP IT LIKE THIS! The twin sibling of That's Just the
Way it is. For here we've arrived. We like it. We want to hold. We know
who's at the table with us. No changing the chairs, no new guests, no
Difference. SETTLE. KEEP IT LIKE THIS! Is born of a heart captured
By wanting to be in charge
It is to such rule bound hearts that Jesus
Invades with grace, upsets, disturbs!
The forgiven women stands witness for all those
Who break through unspoken rules and encounter the
Living God...Who is this who even forgives sins??

Imagine writes Richard Rory that we were so in touch with the spirit of
Jesus that we are like an ever expanding movie screen, that we are opened to
receive more and more, believing that what God wants for us is an ever
widening screen.

For those who follow Jesus include a Mary Magdalene
Who has been cured of 7 demons!! How's that for Jesus
Widening our screens?

Knock-knock. Who's there?

Stretched. Stretched who? Stretched by grace!!