

Surprised by God

7/06/26 am Luke 7:36-50 with Ben

There is a lot to learn. In some environments out learning really accelerates. Moments when God surprises us, tend to be the moments when accelerated learning is on offer. I cannot think of

a single event when God is surprised. But time after time people in the Bible are surprised by God; sometimes falling to the ground in shock and amazement.

In the modern western world the most influential book *The Institute of the Christian Religion* was written by John Calvin in the 1500's. He sets out to establish what is this Christian faith of ours? Who is Jesus and what is it to be a human being? 'He opens with a provocative statement. "...true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected together by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other. For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves;" In short if you think you are truly getting to know yourself it can't happen unless at the same time you are learning something about God. At the same time if you are learning something true about God, you will learn something about yourself. "On the other hand, it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God," In a passage like this we begin to see how God, intervening in men's lives and revealing more of himself, at the same time reveals to them something about who they are too. When God works in your life you find out something about him and also about yourself. The two things go hand-in-hand at all times. It is false knowledge if you think you are learning about God but not learning about yourself and visa versa. There are certain conditions where this knowledge accelerates. It is usually when the situation is surprisingly difficult. When life gets complicated God is giving us a great opportunity to learn something new. We get comfortable in our groups where we are the same, where we are all like-minded, same age, culture or same gender and we all just mosey along not learning very much.

Simon the Pharisee and his little traditional, fastidious, judgemental pharisee group could have had a very easy evening discussing pharisee stuff and Jesus and his disciples could have had an easy evening discussing their group stuff. Jesus could have said to Simon thanks for the invitation but we don't work well together. And the woman could have just hung out with her sinner-type friends doing simple-sinner stuff. I don't know what possessed Simon that he invited Jesus into his house but Jesus decided to go and hang out with Simon and mix things up. There is an uneasy tension in the room when suddenly, with the arrival of the uninvited guest, they are in free-fall. We have no idea what is coming at us on any day: we live in the realm of the unexpected, the flat tyre, any complication that put you in free-fall. But we must not miss the opportunity afforded by a crisis. Simon and his guests are faced with something they must learn about God and about themselves.

Luke wants us to know that Jesus is a prophet and able to know what is on someone's mind so he can answer someone who hasn't even said anything out loud. He knows the tipping-point that will reveal to you something about yourself and God, that brings things to the surface so he can speak into your life and teach you life's most precious lessons. By the end of the passage Jesus is revealed as more than a prophet, he forgives sins. Who alone can do this? We measure our standards against God himself. Jesus is God come amongst you, the one who knows all things who alone has the power to forgive you. When you are forgiven by God you are forgiven! No one can take that from you. It is yours from Heaven itself. This man is a prophet and God himself in the flesh, at work revealing truth on days when you feel everything is out of control. On those days are we learning the precious truths of God? In the chaos there are lessons for us just like there were lessons for Simon and this woman. He knows everything about us and he is willing and ready, if you will be honest and see your sinfulness, to forgive your sin if you will just appeal to him. It will only happen in a real-life situation and it will happen over and over again until the lesson is learned.

There are unanswered questions like how she got in? was she a prostitute? how expensive was this perfume? was her behaviour unseemly in this culture? We tend to ask why things like this

happen to us here and now? There are so many unanswered questions. Why? Why? Why? As Jesus turns to Simon he asks a very profound question, 'Do you see this woman?' She pleases the Lord. If she bought the perfume with the proceeds of crime would Jesus allow it to be poured out on his feet? Would the Lord Jesus accept your offering if it were from the proceeds of your coke dealing? We know that Jesus is pleased with her even though what she is doing is surprising and unexpected. No matter how surprising and unexpected your situation is right now, if this is the Lord's plan for you at this time, you may not get all the answers so get the main point. Find out more about yourself and more about God. Grow as a Christian, grow as a believer. If you will learn the lessons he has given you, you will become more like Jesus.

God knows what we are like even if we don't. He wants us to be realistic about ourselves. Neither Simon nor the woman were realistic about themselves, they don't really know themselves or God as he is. Was the woman's response normal? She comes to give Jesus the perfume but she starts to cry and that makes a mess that she tries to clean up but she doesn't have a towel so she uses her hair. She gets out the perfume and pours that on but it is a blubbing mess. Is she ok? Does she understand herself? Does she understand God and his grace? Some people are programmed into thinking that they are the worst person in the whole world. They have tender consciences and they hurt to their core. This woman is so broken and shattered that she comes to Christ in this blubbing mess.

Simon didn't greet Jesus. He didn't treat him with respect or love him. What a cold fish. He is shot through with an unbelievably bad attitude: suspicious, cynical and cold. He does not manifest the image of God for all his religiosity. She is so broken. She should have been able to walk up to Jesus and say, "I know I am a sinner would you forgive me." And he would. The other guy should be more aware of his really bad attitude and say to Jesus, "It's great you have come to dinner, I know I am a sinner, would you forgive me." And Jesus would say yes and then she and he and Jesus and the disciple and everyone else at the table would be able to get together and have communion together. Do you think we are all supposed to be as broken and shattered as she was or cold and indifferent as he was? In the end what is really important about this is that both of these people had to recognise who they really are and who Jesus really is and just commit themselves to him and he forgives. You will be his. He will love you and walk with you. You will be a Christian and that is good. It doesn't have to be a big drama because in the end it is not the measure of the outpouring of emotion that saves her or the lack of emotion that saves him but the things that saves them both is faith. Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you"

No big drama. Do you believe? Have you put your trust in him; that his death on the cross paid the price your sins deserve. If you see it, have you accepted it? If you have accepted it do you know your sins are forgiven? That's the best news in the world! Make the main thing the main thing and be surprised at how simple, how beautiful, how easy the plan of salvation is. Be surprised by God and just trust him to keep us forever and the whole of Heaven is yours forever. Eternal life through Jesus Christ is surprising!

As we take communion together I hope and pray that everyone of you who has put your trust in Jesus will know that this meal is for you. We all have different backgrounds, brought together by Jesus. It delights him that we are such a mixed bag. It is sad when we find churches of just one kind of people. Jesus wants these strange banquets of very varied and different people where sin manifests itself in so many different ways but where we have all found such a beautiful answer. I have put my trust in Jesus, my sins are forgiven and he has forgiven you too. We are one in Jesus Christ. Jesus was able to dispense the power of the cross before it happened and he does that for us now as we sing of the power of the cross.