

DR. MICHAEL B. BROWN

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# The Woman Who Welcomed Jesus

*SERMON VOL. 01/11*

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MARBLE VISION

Media Ministries of  
Marble Collegiate Church



*Dear Friend,*

*There's a lovely quote from medieval mystic, Mechthild von Magdeburg. She said: "How should one live? Live welcoming to all." That is a truly Christian way to approach life. "Above all, love each other deeply," the New Testament says. "Offer hospitality to all ...." (1 Peter 4: 8-9)*

*In this mailing you will find a sermon based on an incident from the life of Jesus, how one person refused hospitality to him, and how another stepped in and compensated. Hopefully it will remind us of the faith-based expectation that we will treat each other hospitably, as well as the promise of faith which says that is how Christ treats us.*

*May God walk with you as you enter a new year!*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael B. Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

DR. MICHAEL B. BROWN, MINISTER

## The Woman Who Welcomed Jesus

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.' Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' 'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

~ *Luke 7: 36-50*

*“I tell you, her sins, which are many,  
are forgiven, for she loved much.”*

(Luke 7: 47)

I WAS INTERESTED TO FIND when I arrived at Marble that you have a Ministry of Hospitality. Every church should. And you do it well – from the Greeters when people walk in, to the Newcomers’ Tables when visitors are about to leave. You make people feel welcome, wanted, affirmed. People can’t come here without knowing how happy we are that they did.

When we ring a doorbell, it is one thing for the person who answers to say: *“Oh, it’s you!”* It is quite another for them to say: *“Oh... it’s you.”* It’s all a matter of hospitality. And that applies at the door of a church as much as at the door of someone’s home.

There is a story in the Gospel of Luke about Jesus being invited to the home of Simon the Pharisee. While He was seated at Simon’s table, a woman walked in and kissed Jesus, washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Now, that’s an interesting scene. Obviously she was not invited to the dinner. So where did she come from? It’s pretty rare that when we give a dinner party, uninvited folks from the street just wander in. *How do you explain the presence of this woman?*

In that day and age, when large dinner parties were given, the host always had more food prepared than his

guests could consume. It was standard practice. And townspeople (usually poor people, sometimes homeless and hungry people) would gather in the courtyard of the person's house and simply wait. After all the guests had been served and had eaten their fill, the host would have the remaining food distributed among those who waited in the courtyard. It was a show of charity. It made the host look good in the eyes of his guests. Obviously this woman in Luke's story was one of the people who had gathered in the courtyard to wait. But, unlike the others, she had crashed the party. She had gone inside the house where she greeted Jesus with a kiss, washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.

Now, *what about what she did... the kiss, the tears, the hair?*

In our culture, we have four welcoming rituals. If someone drops by our house, we will probably do these four things (if, in fact, you are glad to see them):

- (1) We say "Hello"
- (2) We follow that with "Won't you come in?"
- (3) After that we say "Have a seat"
- (4) Finally, usually, is something like "May I offer you something to drink?" Those are the things we do in our culture out of courtesy for a guest.

In Jesus' age and culture, there were three welcoming rituals:

- (1) You kissed your visitor (much as we might hug or shake hands)
- (2) You washed their hands
- (3) You washed their feet.

Jesus says to His host: "When I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet... You gave me no kiss... But she wet my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair and has not ceased to kiss my feet." In other words, she offered Jesus the hospitality that Simon had refused.

Do you know what happened here? This woman - standing in the courtyard - had watched as Jesus went to Simon's door. She had seen Jesus treated discourteously, as if Simon opened the door and said: "Oh, it's only You." She was embarrassed for Jesus. And so she provided a courtesy, a hospitality, that He should have received from Simon but didn't.

"Hospitality" has been defined as "the art of making someone feel at home when, in fact, you wish they were." Simon would have given Jesus the impression - by his lack of courtesy, his absence of hospitality - that he wished Jesus were anywhere but in Simon's house. But sometimes you run across someone just the opposite of that, someone who makes you feel valued, and it's as if you were touched by the very Grace of God.



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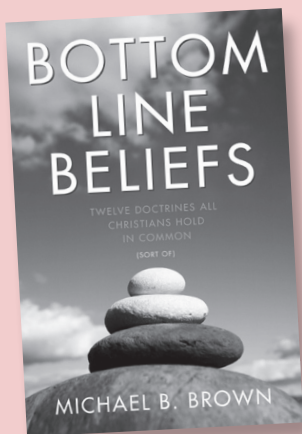
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- |                 |                                       |
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| <b>10:00 AM</b> | Bible Study with Sister Carol Perry   |
| <b>11:00 AM</b> | Worship Service                       |
| <b>12:15 PM</b> | Talkback with Dr. Michael Brown       |
| <b>12:45 PM</b> | Replay of Bible Study                 |
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When we first moved to the city, I stopped in a little market one cold, winter day, located on the corner of 35th and Lexington. Like most of the corner delis up here, it sells a little bit of everything. There was a line of people waiting to check out. Behind me in line was a small-of-frame woman whom, I soon learned, is big of heart. She was standing there with her basket of groceries, wearing a happy smile at no one in particular. And she was, well, chatty. When I simply made eye contact, her smile suddenly grew larger, and the chat began. Somewhere in the midst of it, she said: "Don't you just love Murray Hill?" Now remember, I had been here maybe two weeks, if that. Brand new. Didn't even know "uptown" from "downtown," let alone the neighborhoods. So, she said: "Don't you just love Murray Hill?," to which I answered: "I'm sorry. I don't think I know who he is." That drew a few curious looks from the other people in line, but this little lady said: "You're in it. Murray Hill is this neighborhood. And you will love it – and it will love you." Well, we were only in that neighborhood a brief while, but from that very moment I felt welcomed there, included and valued, because someone had taken the time simply to be courteous to a stranger.

Courtesy does go a long way, doesn't it? How we deal with strangers or customers, employees, neighbors, family members, friends, whether or not we make them feel honored and valued. And doing so (treating people with courtesy and kindness) is part of what Jesus was getting at when He said: "Do

unto others what you would have them do unto you.”

Now, here's another point we don't want to miss. Jesus said to Simon: “You gave Me no water for My feet... But she wet My feet with her tears.” In those days, Jewish people kept what were called “tear cups.” On a shelf, like a hearth, those cups would be stored. And when a person remembered her pains and griefs and could feel “a good cry” coming on, she would literally weep into the tear cup. They saved their tears. They could look at the containers, as visible reminders of the pains they had suffered. When Jesus said: “She wet My feet with her tears,” He probably did not mean that she had cried over His feet. Instead, in order to prove to the owner of the house how sad and needy her life was (and therefore to receive a healthy gift of left-over food) she had probably brought her tear cups with her. And she poured out her griefs at Jesus' feet!

The late Dr. Charles Allen wrote in his book *What I Have Lived By* of a Sunday morning as he spoke with worshippers who were leaving his church in Houston, Texas. A mid-life couple whom he did not know walked up and shook hands. “I'm so glad you are here,” said Dr. Allen. “Are you visiting with us?” They said: “Yes. We needed to be here this morning. We have one child, a sixteen year old son. Last week he was killed in an automobile accident. We were hoping to find something here that could help us survive.”

“We were hoping to find something here that could help us survive.” That couple had brought their cup of tears to a house where they knew they could find Jesus, just as the woman in Luke’s story did, and just as so many do here week by week. I look out and see the faces of folks whose relationships have ended, or whose loved ones have died, or whose diagnoses have been frightening, or whose jobs have been down-sized. I know that week by week we have folks who bring their cup of tears to this place - hoping to find a Dinner Guest Whose love can heal them. And I believe that when we pour out our tears at God’s feet, comfort does come, in a way too great to understand, let alone explain. We find healing when we bring our pains to Christ. And sometimes, sometimes, we find it through the hospitality extended to us by those who love in His Name.

I like the story of the little girl whose mother sent her to the corner store. She was gone a rather long time, and Mom became worried. Finally, though, her daughter came home. Her mom asked why it took so long to go so short a distance and just pick up a couple of little things. Her daughter answered: “Because I met Nancy on the way. She had dropped her doll and broken it, and I had to help her.” Her mother was curious what her little girl could possibly have done to fix a broken doll, so she asked: “What did you do for Nancy?” And the child answered: “I sat down beside her and helped her cry!”

Sometimes the most Christ-like courtesy we can extend to another person in his or her brokenness is simply to stand beside them, to enter into their pain with them, to hold them close and help them cry, so that they know they do not face their pains alone. The woman at Simon's banquet brought her cup of tears to Jesus and found healing. We find that same healing when we pour out our griefs at His feet. And we become instruments of His healing when others can bring their cup of tears to us.

This story from Luke concludes with Christ's words: "I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she has loved much!" In other words, the unsung deed of hospitality and faith that she offered not only brightened someone else's life but also brightened her own. I suspect that is always the case.

Let us pray.

*Gracious Savior, Who treats us with dignity and courtesy, extend Your healing hospitality through us. Let others feel welcomed and affirmed by how we treat them. May our love for our neighbor reveal our love for You. And as we brighten the lives of others, may our own lives also begin to glow. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.*

Marble Collegiate Church, New York, NY  
11/7/2010

# MARBLE VISION

MEDIA MINISTRIES OF MARBLE COLLEGIATE CHURCH

**Dr. Michael B. Brown** is the minister of New York City's historic Marble Collegiate Church. This publication is an edited sermon, originally delivered by Dr. Brown from the pulpit. We believe you will find his message one of encouragement and challenge for growth in your daily life.

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