

What is holding you back today?

John and Margery, with flights booked, were being held back from going on a vacation. They had to go to the dentist to get a tooth pulled and they needed it done immediately. "I want a tooth pulled, and I don't want any freezing because I'm in a big hurry," Margery said. "Just extract the tooth as quickly as possible, and we'll be on our way."

The dentist was quite impressed. "You're certainly a courageous woman," he said. "Which tooth is it?"

Margery turned to her husband John and said, "Show him your tooth, dear."

Text: "It is the person who is forgiven little who shows little love."

St Luke 7: 47

Psychologists will often tell us that there are 4 big categories of thinking that hold us all back: criticism, fear, guilt and resentment.

When someone criticizes you, inappropriately, how do you react? Do you immediately become defensive? Or does the criticism roll off you, like water off a duck's back?

What are you afraid of today? Do you find yourself tense all the time? Are you afraid of losing the approval of others or someone close to you? Do you lack self confidence? Or are you confident and happy and comfortable in your own skin?

What about guilt? Do we drag guilt around with us? Do we use guilt on others to try to manipulate them? Are we too rough on ourselves? Do we beat ourselves up for things that we have not done that we could have done if we were not so busy? Do we hold a job with high expectations that we feel that we are not meeting?

And what about resentment? Do we hold grudges? Do we keep score cards on others? Or have we learned the wisdom to overlook a fault and cut someone slack? What are you carrying anger about? Did your marriage go sideways and are you still resentful of that husband, wife or mistress? Did you lose a job and you still have not got over it? Are you still upset about your parents and what they did to you? What do you carry resentment about?

Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to a meal. These were public affairs in those days open to anyone. A prostitute came in with a long reputation. She had heard that Jesus would be dining with this Pharisee and had brought with her an expensive jar of ointment. She waited behind Jesus, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, so she knelt down and wiped them away with her hair. Then she covered his feet with kisses and then anointed them with ointment.

And Simon's critical track started up in his mind. He had invited Jesus in to dine because he had thought him to be a prophet. But obviously Jesus was no prophet because he did not meet Simon's expectations of what a prophet should be.

Are you in a job where there are high expectations like being a doctor, a dentist, a school principal, a teacher, a policeperson, a politician, a judge or a pastor? I know as a pastor that people's expectations are high. I read of a pastor leaving the pastorate after 22 years who said "that being a pastor was like being a dog at a whistler's convention." She said that she did not miss the gut wrenching feeling she got every time someone announced that they were leaving the church because their needs weren't being met.

So, if you are in a high expectation profession, listen up, this little gem of a story from the Gospel is for you.

There were huge expectations around Jesus and as far as Simon was concerned Jesus was not measuring up. Jesus should have known who this woman was. Simon knew she was a prostitute and the fact that she was touching Jesus in an intimate way consternated Simon. Jesus should have refused the touch by saying “Excuse me but what you are doing is inappropriate. Stop it now.” But in Simon’s mind Jesus lets her do her thing, intimately, in public no less. Did Jesus not have a sense of shame? Shouldn’t he feel guilty? In Simon’s mind pPerhaps Jesus liked this intimate touch from a prostitute?

So, Simon criticized Jesus in his heart.

Perhaps it was only a withering look of contempt, but Jesus was aware. Should Jesus let it go or should he challenge Simon? Let’s ask in terms of this story, **how did Jesus deal with negative criticism?**

First, He got Simon’s attention and then told him a story about two debtors, one who owed a large amount and another a lesser amount and asked, if they were both forgiven their respective debts, which would love the creditor more? And Simon, does not avoid the question but answers it the right way: “The one who was pardoned more I suppose.”

But what Jesus does next is fascinating. He doesn’t stop there, **he answers Simon’s negative criticism of the woman with affirmation.** Jesus affirms and praises this prostitute and her actions and then he makes a case for Simon’s conscience. **The prostitute did what Simon should have done but did not. She washed Jesus’ feet.**

From time to time most of us make the mistake of Simon. **We criticize others for weaknesses that we find in ourselves.** People are mirrors to us and our behavior. Frequently criticism, fear, guilt and resentment come from blaming others and not taking responsibility ourselves. This

was Simon's problem. Jesus' answer to criticism was affirmation. We can learn that from him.

If we are on our own case for something we have done, the problem that is likely holding us back, **is lack of self-worth**. We need to affirm ourselves and others if we are to end criticism's power over us.

Gratitude is the best antidote to criticism. It needs to be genuine and it must affirm the one criticized, whether it is yourself or someone else. **Let's counter negative criticism with affirmation.** What a lesson is here!

The second of the Big four is fear. Jesus does not appear to be afraid of anything. He does not get embarrassed. He is not tainted by any association. His company on his cross was two thieves. His day companions were tax collectors, publicans and sinners. He didn't fear peer review. How about that? Why is he so free?

The Bible says that perfect love casts out fear. And the story Jesus tells is about love not fear. Jesus is not afraid of what people think about him. He sees the woman before him and he loves her and sees her love. This was a woman who was weeping, and Jesus frames her behavior for Simon with his story. **This woman has been forgiven much so she is able to love deeply.** Here is an incredible lesson indeed!

The critic in Simon is not able to love himself or others. He is blind to this woman and her tears. He sees her only in a role of a prostitute and so he condemns her. Simon is a debtor who needs forgiveness but as far as he is concerned, he doesn't need help, which puts him in his mind in a position to be able to criticize others freely. "I am alright Jack," he says "what's wrong with you?" So, Simon has little love. **He is into control and his critical spirit reveals that.**

The main difference between the woman and Simon is that Simon doesn't get it. He thinks he is fine and that he is in a position to condemn others. But the Bible is very clear. If we do not love, says St Paul, we can even give our bodies to the flames and it counts for nothing. This woman is grateful, aware, and she knows that she is forgiven and the end product of all that **is love**.

What is the lesson? Is fear our enemy? **Love is the antidote to fear**. If we are fearful, we need to affirm ourselves as worthy of being loved. In Jesus' kingdom, the person who has the most love is the most fearless. Look at her in public kissing a Rabbi's feet! There is no fear of the host Simon here. She realizes that Jesus values her and that is enough. Love conquers all, especially fear. If we are full of fear today, then we need to simply love and respect ourselves. We don't need to control everything. Let go! Love is the opposite of control over others.

What about the third big hold back, guilt? The story of the two debtors is about two failures. Both debtors are unable to pay back what they owe. What is the response of the creditor? He could have thrown them in jail, but not in this story. The answer to guilt here is **pardon and forgiveness** and the result of that, according to Jesus is **love for the creditor from the debtors**. This is a metaphor then for the love of God. If anyone could make us feel guilty it would be God. Jesus in the full story of the two debtors shows that God forgives, but with this caveat. **We are forgiven/ as we forgive**. That is also in the Lord's prayer. We are forgiven as we loosen the strands of others guilt that we are holding on to.

Sometimes we bind ourselves to others through guilt. Somebody does something that we don't like. Instead of cutting them slack and preserving the friendship we hold the cords of their guilt. We remind them of previous failures. We keep score and we keep our sense of being

offended. How foolish that is when we could be free! The creditor could have held on to the obligation and made both debtors feel guilty. But he doesn't do that, he pardons the debt and the result is that the one pardoned the most, **loves** the most. Do we want people to really love us? **Trade guilt for forgiveness. Give pardon. Receive love!**

Now for resentment!

Resentment is stuffed down anger. Frequently it is anger buried for a long time. It is very bad for our health. Since we bury resentment deeply it may take some real work to deal with it. Sometimes we would rather die than change our patterns and we sometimes do just that carrying to our grave a buried anger that has weakened our immune system. How sad!

What we learn from Jesus' story about this woman is that **gratitude is the very opposite of resentment**. Love always indicates forgiveness. If we are carrying resentment towards another, we are not able to love them at the same time. The creditor could have resented the fact that the two debtors were not able to repay him. Jesus could have resented Simon criticizing him. Jesus could have resented that this prostitute was touching him. He could have thought it inappropriate as Simon did. But Jesus is not into resentment.

Let's note that the person who has little to forgive does not have much experience of gratitude. After all, we say, it was a small debt so I don't have to be too grateful. But if it is a serious debt and we are forgiven much, if we are normal at all, then the response is gratitude.

How do we deal with that resentment that is deep within us? It is best to find a way to forgive.

I found a story about a woman whose daughter was shot to death by a teenager. She was in a car and the teenager fired a shot and hit her and bullet lodged in her brain and she died in the hospital. The young man was jailed for 14 years and the mother of the girl carried resentment at the deepest levels. Her family couldn't get over the killing and one by one they died of various ailments until she was left alone. The mother blamed everything on this young man.

But one day a letter came telling her that he would be released from jail. She was furious, white hot mad. She thought about this all the time. She was consumed with resentment.

Her pastor talked with her about forgiveness. She didn't want to hear about that. She wanted this man to be behind bars for the rest of his life.

The pastor was aware of this young man and the release program and told the woman about it and asked whether she could meet with him. She refused but she couldn't leave the idea alone. So, one day she agreed and she met the young man and they sat down and talked together. She asked him about the circumstances of the shooting and he told her that he had shot her daughter by mistake, because he didn't even see that she was in the back seat. It was a random shot that took her life and he was very sorry indeed.

Suddenly this woman decided to let it all go and she stood up and opened her arms and forgave that young man. They held each other in an embrace and they both sobbed.

And suddenly, for the first time in 14 years, she was free. And as for the boy, now a man, deep gratitude! He who is forgiven much, loves much.

The big four, are tyrants that hold us all back! Let's clean house today!