

Today marks week 3 of Lent 2025. For those of you who gave up something for Lent, we're half-way there! And what are we serving up today in our Lenten Series, Meeting Jesus at the Table? We are serving interruption. A dinner interrupted. We turn to Luke for our dining experience with Jesus. In this passage we see a dinner party with an interruption orchestrated by a woman who a no good, scroungy sinner. But this interruption will find a surprising response when Jesus responds to her with surprising grace.

We've all experienced it. Those family get-togethers where any interruption would be welcome to break up whatever contentious conversation is taking place. Something like this Thanksgiving skit.

### Show Video

As we just saw in this clip from Saturday Night Live, the interruption of Adele singing "Hello" was actually a welcome one. If only dinner family squabbles could be so easily solved.

In Luke's story today we have Jesus who is just beginning to gain a reputation. In his ministry he performs healings and exorcisms. Large crowds start following him everywhere. They wanted to hear more from this "rabbi" who taught a much different message about the kingdom of God.

Our dinner host is Simon. Simon is a reputable Pharisee. Simon's intent for inviting Jesus to dinner, wasn't completely out of a sense of hospitality. Jesus was a novelty in the eyes of Jewish leaders, so Simon was pleased to have a guest who just might be able to amuse his guests. Upon entering Simon's house, Jesus received less than celebrity status hospitality. Jesus was not there as a guest of honor. He was there as *the* evening entertainment.

At first, Simon's guests were disappointed. There were no wild antics like Jesus' cousin John the Baptist. Not even biting a locust in two. No, as it turns out Jesus is cool. He's

knowledgeable. He's interesting and engaging. The oddity was to be found in the crowd that followed Jesus.

Picture Jesus approaching Simon's house. You know how it is when something odd happens outside your house. You crowd around your window to peek out. That's what Simon and his guests did. They weren't about to miss the chance to see Jesus do something extraordinary. And at first their curiosity was not peaked. Until. Until, until, until.

At some point in the evening enter...the party crasher. A woman described here as simply a sinner. Later historians will paint her as a prostitute even though no Gospel accounts indicate this. So for our purposes today she is simply a sinner. While this may be a surprise to us readers, it didn't seem to be a surprise to Simon and his dinner guests. They seem to know this sinner.

Forget that there were crowds, forget that Jesus was at an invitation only dinner event. This woman simply could not wait. Her need to meet and honor Jesus was far too great. She enters Simon's house carrying an alabaster jar full of oil. Oh, how scandalous this was!

But it gets spicier. The woman kneels, not in front of, but behind Jesus. The minute she does, her eyes fill with tears. She can't hold back. Her tears flow and flow and flow. So many tears. Enough that she can actually wash Jesus' feet with them. She carries no towel with her. So she does the next salacious thing. She takes down her hair. She unknots it, lets it drape down her back. She grabs her hair in her hands. She wipes Jesus' feet with her hair.

So much scandal and yet she's not quite done. She commits the most outrageous deed yet. She takes the alabaster jar of oil and anoints Jesus' feet with it. This wasn't just your regular canola oil. This was precious oil. It was costly. It most likely cost her everything she had.

As we form a picture of this scene in our minds, we might find ourselves feeling a little uncomfortable. Her actions are so intimate. Back in Jesus' day, priests, kings, and prophets were

publicly anointed. A body was anointed as an act of hospitality or in preparation for burial. These were familiar. These were normal.

But publicly anointing the feet only of someone? This was heard of. This was the kind of act saved for a private moment between a man and his wife or his slave. To do this in public would be the ultimate shock. So shocking, that over 2000 years later we're still talking about this odd act of devotion that interrupted the perfect evening.

There isn't just a single interruption, there are layers of interruption steeped in this story. First, the dinner party itself is interrupted. It leaves Simon asking questions to himself about the validity of Jesus being called a prophet. Simon ponders, "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." Simon's guests arrived with a lot of anticipation. They were finally going to get to meet this new radical. Have a private audience with whoever this Jesus was. And now what?

Jesus was also interrupted. Things were going so well for him. He was masterfully "playing it cool." Jesus was showing these religious elite gawkers that he could just as easily engage with the likes of them as he could with tax collectors and sinners. This was a dinner for Pharisees and here comes this woman. And what does she do? She bursts in with an intrusive and tearful act of devotion. Jesus watches as discomfort washes over the whole room. So much for tactfully engaging with these guests who were guardedly watching him. The next thing you know Simon's guests were recoiling and now...they must think he's even more radical.

Dinner plans...interrupted. Social norms...interrupted. And one last interruption. The plans of the woman. No doubt party crashing was not on her schedule. But when she learned that Jesus would be attending a dinner party at Simon's house, she knew that now was the time.

So she rushes out to buy an alabaster jar of ointment. She will anoint Jesus' feet. She arrives at the door of Simon's house. She pauses for a minute, hand on the door shaking. With a deep breath, she bursts in and approaches Jesus. The next thing she knew, her face is drowning in

tears. So many tears. She just couldn't make them stop. She looked at Jesus' feet and saw how dusty they were. She knew just what to do. She would wash his feet with these overflowing tears. But how would Jesus respond?

I think back to a kid named Billy. Billy was a good kid. But one day he found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time. It started out well enough. He rode his bike over to a friend's house. There Billy met up with several other friends. They tore off on their bikes, riding through ditches and drive thru lanes. As 10-year-old boys will do, they also cooked up some pranks, daring each other to play them out on unsuspecting victims.

Billy's turn came up. His prank? Go into a neighbor's yard and steal vegetables from her garden. And he did just that. Then he jumped on his bike, and they all tore off down the road. Billy did it! The rest of the boys cheered. Billy was a legend. Until he got home. He didn't even make it into the house before guilt started washing over him. What was he going to do? His mother usually asked him how his day went. He was going to have to lie straight to her face.

He walked in and sure enough, there she was. She gave that same loving smile she did every day and asked Billy how his day went. He took one look at her and burst into tears. Just like our woman in our story today, he cried and cried and cried. His mother, she just held him. Of course she knew what had happened. In small town America back in the day, when something like that happened, you could be sure that the neighbor had already called Billy's mom and told her what happened.

She could have given him what for. She could have spanked him, grounded him, sent him to bed without supper. But instead she just held him, let him cry, and let him know how much she loved him.

Like Billy's best efforts not to cry, perhaps that was the intent of the woman when she burst into Simon's house to see Jesus. Her only plan had been to anoint Jesus' feet with that alabaster jar of ointment. She was going to show those religious leaders. Civil disobedience. But when she saw Jesus, her plans changed. They were interrupted.

Jesus was the loving parent; she was the guilt-ridden child. The only thing needed here was tears of sorrow and repentance. No words necessary. Jesus' presence offered her forgiveness to whatever her sins were. That is surprising grace!

Until today, perhaps you've only thought of interruptions as frustrating. Who are my planners out there? I know you. You map out every detail according to the vision in your head. Outings, dinner parties, Thanksgiving meals all planned down to every last detail. In total control over whatever crisis or issue may arise.

But even the best laid plans can be met with interruptions that stop us in our tracks. Consider this. Perhaps the next interruption will bring you closer to someone. Perhaps the next interruption will stop your bickering and fighting. Perhaps the next interruption will lead to a common good.

Interruptions could also cause you to act like Simon. Withdrawing, whispering to himself and his friends, fomenting about how displeased he was, how uncomfortable he was with this interruption.

Jesus knew how to use interruptions to teach. Interruptions were turned into parables, visions, times for pausing and considering: what can we learn here?

Today we can learn from this woman who interrupted a dinner to see Jesus. The minute she sees Jesus she bursts into tears. Were they tears of guilt? Maybe. Or were they tears of joy and healing and transformation. Or maybe tears that can only be shed when your life is interrupted by grace.

How about us, Church Family? How do you think we would respond to such an interruption? How would we respond to grace unfolding in our midst?

In this third week of Lent, let us seek to be open to the interruptions that might meet us throughout this coming week. May God give us the strength to see them as opportunities for growth and learning. Let's shake off the Simon syndrome. That's the condition that causes us to mumble disapprovingly. Instead, Church Family, may we take each interruption for what it is. An opportunity. An interruption is an opportunity. An opportunity for growth. An opportunity for love. An opportunity for Grace.

May our opportunity for Grace be so overwhelming that it needs no words. Let that grace be so amazing that it moves us to tears. Let us pray.