Who is this, who even forgives sins? The accusation of the Pharisees

A Pharisee invites Jesus to eat with him, in his home at his table.

You have to wonder what this Pharisee is thinking, why did he invite this unusual rabbi, teacher, to come to eat with him. Was he interested in increasing his own standing in the community? To be the one person that Jesus ate dinner with... sort of like all those old inns that claim President so and so slept here! I wonder...

The Pharisee is horrified that a sinful woman of the city came and sat down at Jesus’ feet. She began weeping, and as her tears fell she began wiping his feet clean with her hair and anointing them with ointment.

The Pharisees Accuse Jesus

“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 is often pictured as teaching during meal times. In fact nine times Jesus is depicted this way in Luke. He is often also accused of eating with sinners and tax collectors...

Luke 7:34 the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’

Jesus names this Pharisee Simon, and tells him he has something to say... Simon responds “Say it Teacher... Go ahead Rabbi... And Jesus responds as if to say “Simon you can learn something from this woman.”

Jesus tells a story of a certain moneylender who forgave two debtors and asked which one loved the forgiver more? Simon rightly responded, the one whom he cancelled the larger debt.

Then Jesus turns to the woman and told Simon that when he entered his house nobody cleaned his feet as was customary, nobody even gave him water for his feet. But this woman washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Simon did not great Jesus with a kiss but this woman did not cease kissing his feet.

And then Jesus proclaimed: Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.

Jesus turned to her and proclaimed: Your sins are forgiven!
Then those at the table accused Jesus:

**Who is this, who even forgives sins?**

- I wonder what my response would have been if I was there...
- I wonder if I could also learn something from this sinful woman...

**Recall The Prodigal Son Luke 15:11-32**

Hear the accusation of the Elder Brother

‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’

Hear the accusation... **Who is this, who even forgives sins?**

I slaved - you squandered... like father like son! Both prodigals!

**FATHER’S LOVING RESPONSE:** Rejoice with me! Feast with me! He who was lost now is found!

**Ease Of Loving The Broken Hearted**

But I find it much easier to love the broken hearted in our midst than I do the Pharisees and the Elder Sons. When I read the scriptures I take pity on these sorry characters, as the author wants me to. I think to myself I would never have treated Jesus the way Simon did.

**My pride is exposed.**

Today we live isolated lives from those who are in real need. They live in a different part of town, a different social circle. Even here at the Academy we have an added level of exclusion. Chaplain Gore referred to this campus as a gated community, and it is. We all need special photo ID to get in, and not all state driver’s licenses will work. We need special permission to bring our cars aboard making it even more difficult for those less sure footed in our congregation. Today we are isolated.

We do not see the broken hearted here at the Naval Academy, and when we do it is usually when we volunteer at a food bank or homeless shelter. We can easily spend a few hours in their midst and tend to their immediate needs and leave the place feeling like we have done something good for our fellow man. We can feel proud; we loved like Jesus Loved. It is not hard to love the broken hearted.
Hard to Love the Simons

Why do I find it harder to love the Pharisees, those Simons, those Elder brothers who judged Christ and his ease of forgiving. Who said: **Who is this, who even forgives sins?**

I have often wondered why. Why do I find it so difficult to Love the Simons and the Elder brothers in our midst?

Is it just because the author wants me to reject the behavior of these Pharisees? Or is there something more that Jesus wants me to learn from the sinful woman at Jesus’ feet?

**It is hardest to forgive in others the very sins you detest in yourself.**

You see I find it difficult to Love the Simons of the church because I am a Simon. I am an older brother...

I became a Christian when I was only three... I was raised in the Church... never was there a time in which I did not believe.

In younger days, sin was only the bad things one did. Forgiveness implied only avoidance of punishment... Since the bad things I did weren't all that bad, or they didn't even occur that often, I didn't think I needed much forgiving – I wasn't like those other sinners in the world... those broken hearted.

**I was an elder brother... I was a Pharisee, a Simon.**

Part of my growth in faith is to become more aware of the depth of my own sinfulness; to measure the depth of sin within the deepest darkest recesses of my heart.

I've come to realize that my sinfulness is much deeper than my bad deeds -- it involves inner attitudes, my desires and motivations. I have found the human heart to be utterly sinful. Sin is more than what I do... it is who I am outside of Christ, a selfish man who could not rejoice with his Father at the return of his lost brother; a selfish Pharisee who accused Jesus:

**Who is this, who even forgives sins?**

And so I realized, although my life was characterized by my obedience, I am yet desperately in need of a savior. I am in need of the forgiveness and grace that reaches the deepest depths of my own heart. It is a scary thing to look into your own heart... to see your own sin.
But we can take courage for Romans tells us *where sin increased, grace increased all the more.*

And when I realized the truth of Jesus, and his love for even someone like me, a Pharisee, my accusation turned to Joy!

I no longer accuse *Who is this, who even forgives sins?*

I now rejoice *Who is this Jesus! He forgives all our sins!*

**The Challenge**

The Challenge for us today is to see ourselves anew. We need to realize that this scripture was written to us, Christ’s Church. He is calling us to acknowledge that we are all Simons. We are all elder sons! He is calling us to see ourselves equally in need of a savior as the sinful woman and respond with the same Love, realizing of the depth from which he has saved us. He calls us like the prodigal’s father said to the elder son, to come in and rejoice with him, what was lost is now found!

Simon called Jesus "teacher" “rabbi” and Jesus taught him to look at this sinful woman:

- She can also be his teacher.
- She can teach him about being truly forgiven.
- She can teach him about receiving a full measure of grace.
- She can teach him about rejoicing in her great salvation.
- She can teach him about true love and hospitality.

**She can teach us as well.**

I told you that I find it hard to love the Simons in our midst, to love our elder brothers... I vow to you today that I will proclaim the Gospel to you and to myself, to Love you as Christ loved the sinful woman, as the Prodigal Father loved his two sons... and when I fail forgive me.

Will you promise and vow today to love one another as a sinner truly forgiven... already forgiven in Christ?

*Who is this Jesus! He forgives all our sins!*