

# “Do You See This Woman?”

*11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a, Galatians 2:15-21,  
Luke 7:36-8:3*

The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens  
Senior Minister

*June 12, 2016*

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: [home@first-church.org](mailto:home@first-church.org)

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, June 12, 2016, Pentecost 4, dedicated to the memory of my father, the late Dr. Herman C. Ahrens, Jr. on the occasion of his 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday, to Lauren Glaros, to the women on our full-time staff: Sharon Leidheiser, Marty Worth, Amy Wagner and Rev. Emily Corzine for their tireless work for First Church, to all our First Church volunteers who come at all hours of the day and night to give and give and give some more and always to the glory of God!

***“Do You See This Woman?”***

*1 Kings 21:1-10, 15-21a, Galatians 2:15-21, Luke 7:36-8:3*

+++++

*Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

+++++

In her poem “Contact Lenses,” Audre Lorde speaks about coming to see differently. She speaks of a time when “*seeing was a matter of what was in front of my eyes matching what was behind my brain*” (Audre Lorde, *The Black Unicorn: Poems*)

(N.Y., N.Y. W.W. Norton, 1978, p.94). Audre Lorde blessed the world with lenses to see what was in front of us in relation to women, race, sexual orientation and so much more. She was able to make us match sight and what was behind our brains. Through her poetry, she still does.

To see what is in front of our eyes and have it match what is behind our brains must be done – all while clarifying whose filter these have been created by.

In the Gospel of Luke 7:44, in the heart of the story of the woman tending to Jesus and being compassionate to Jesus, he asks the question, “**Do you see this woman?**” The question, directed at Simon is also directed at all of us. The woman, who down through the ages is called many things, mostly a prostitute, is loved and accepted by Jesus just as fully as he is loved and accepted by her. Through the centuries preachers, theologians, Biblical scholars – **most of whom bring a man’s** worldview and identify more closely with Simon than with the unnamed woman – **have not truly “seen this woman.”** Many have simply missed the point of this story altogether. They have written their own words – overriding the Biblical words themselves. She is lost in translation.

In her beautiful exegesis on Luke 7:36-50, Dominican Sister and New Testament Theologian Barbara Reid of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago opens the eyes of anyone who is truly paying attention to see the woman in this story. Dr. Reid writes, “Throughout the gospel, Luke uses “seeing” as a metaphor for perceiving the Word of God. Although seeing is used less in Luke than hearing, both are used as metaphors for the ability to perceive and respond properly to Jesus. “Seeing” is about faith.

Dr. Reid goes on to write, “If one is predisposed to see this woman as a prostitute...one’s imagination would not have to be pressed too far. But if one were predisposed to see in a female figure, a potential disciple, or one who could prefigure the Christ, it is possible to envision the woman’s symbolic action in another direction altogether.

Does not her pouring out of the expensive ointment because of love, prefigure Jesus’ pouring out of his precious blood on behalf of those whom he loves (Luke 22:20)? In fact, this story has a number of connections to the death of Jesus. The woman is promised salvation – just as the repentant criminal is promised salvation. Her tears stand in contrast to those of Peter. Her tears are genuine while Peter’s are self-serving. Her kisses of Jesus’ feet contrast to the kiss of betrayal

on the lips of Judas. And her position of total humility at the feet of Jesus is the stance which he instructs his disciples to take at the last supper – and they do not do it (Luke 22:26, 27). (*“Do You See This Woman?”* an essay by Barbara Reid in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine, Sheffield Academic Press, London, England, 2002, pp. 106-120, this quote is from p. 117).

When Jesus asks, *“do you see this woman?”* the question means to me, do you see how she is a disciple – how she models discipleship? Do you see how she cares for me and for everyone? Do you see her humility and compassion?

Jesus is very concerned about Simon getting corrective lenses. For that matter, the disciples could all use some new lenses. His and their vision of women is messed up. They need to see this woman – and all women.

How about our vision? Of women? Of Jesus? Of discipleship? What about our vision?

Each of us bring to our reading of life our own contexts and experiences. We wear, if you will, our own contact lenses as we look deeply (and sometimes not so deeply) at what is

before us. Through our lenses we need to filter what is seen and what our brains are telling us what is real.

I was thinking of Jesus and the woman at his feet as I stood on the porch of Miss Hazel's house on Wednesday afternoon with our adults and the Youth in Mission in the Hilltop section of Columbus. I was aware that as I listened to Miss Hazel, our 98-year-old hostess, I was hearing truths about her life and faith that were deep and long.

Born in Bellaire, Ohio, across the Ohio River from Wheeling, West Virginia on May 30, 1918, Miss Hazel shared that she grew up in time when children could walk the streets safely, when dinners were always shared around the table every evening with everyone present and that Sundays were always special when they had fried chicken, cooked in lard. They came home from church and ate the "Gospel Bird." More than the stories of "what" were the powerful truths of her life were "how" family, gathered around food and love, really mattered, how growing up was an experience of safety and security. She was at peace on Wednesday as we came around her to help make her life and her home more beautiful.

Jesus question echoed through my brain as I looked at Miss Hazel. "*Do you see this woman?*" I wondered. Frail yet

strong. Imbalanced yet firmly planted in the day which God had given her. Fading eyesight, yet deeply insightful. Seeing Miss Hazel – a woman who could barely see herself – was a gift that all of us were given in this week filled with gifts and memories for the men, women and teens on this week in mission among their neighbors.

Standing at the bedside of Arlene Reynolds this week, I asked her a question I should have asked her a long time ago. I asked, “*How did you come to be so unconditional in your love for all people?*” She told me about her father whom she loved deeply. She told me how that he was a good man, with a good heart but that he was a man who misunderstood and judged too harshly by others. He died too young. From her love for her dad and the love she experienced from so many wonderful people in her life, she learned to love others without judging them.

*“Do you see this woman?”*

How many of us have not truly seen the women of our lives? How many of us have walked away when they were being kind and caring – or not taken a moment to notice all the things they have done for us?

My mother always had my clothes washed, dried and put away. She purchased all of our food, cooked it all, and always had a meal on the table every evening. She had lunches packed every single day of my early childhood. She went to every blessed baseball, basketball, soccer game and the track meets, theatre productions, and more. She picked me up at practice every day. Somehow she found time to do this for my sister and brother, too. **And on top of that, she cared for my father's needs, too.**

She found time to call the sick in our church, drop them notes, cook them meals – and oh – by the way, she taught school for 30 years where she ran a theatre program for hundreds of 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders. For that alone my mother is now on the fast-track to sainthood. I tell you all this for you to reflect on the women in your life and all that they do – unselfishly and with no extra credit or extra pay. And if the people in your life who have done this are men, I would ask **“do you see this man?”**

**This week, may Jesus' words guide your looking and seeing the women around you. “See them” – really see them. See their discipleship. See their caring. See their compassion for others. See their humility in serving. Be aware of the kindness and the unconditional love of the women – some of whom,**

like the woman in this story – have no name. But, also be aware of those who have names in your life and in our faith tradition. **Mary Magdalene, whose saints’ day is July 22<sup>nd</sup>.** Joanna and Susanna (also saints of the church), who provided food and resources to Jesus and the disciples following their healing at the hands of Jesus. Lydia, the first European Christian. The list of women and their amazing faith and accomplishments in the Bible are too limiting -only because the texts have limited them. But, we need to know their names and their stories or the true limitations are in our lenses and what is behind our brains.

*“Do you see this woman?”*

I pray that each of us open our eyes and truly see “this woman” before us. I pray that like this female disciple at the feet of Jesus, the kiss of love, the tears of genuine compassion, and the humility of kneeling on the floor at the feet of the savior may be our vision of discipleship – now and always. Amen.

Copyright 2016, First Congregational Church, UCC