

Along the Way

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The Rev. Mary Norton

In our Bible discussion group, we are working on the Gospel of Luke. I really like this Gospel; I like Luke's focus on the two great commandments. It all pretty much boils down to that.

But along the way in our studies and discussions, we focused on Luke 7: 36 – 50, the anointing of Jesus' feet when he is having dinner at Simon the Pharisee's house. And within that scene, Jesus tells a parable of two debtors who owe, and are not able to repay, a money lender--one in a greater amount than the other. The moneylender forgives both debts. There are many messages to take away from the passage and the parable, but the book we are using to accompany our discussions made a reference that stopped me short.

It said this parable had a theme common in Jesus' parables: that of unpayable debt. I was surprised and intrigued at the same time. The idea of unpayable debt just does not work, for me at least, in terms of our relationship with Jesus Christ. But it's really something to think about, both in that context and the context of daily life.

Many of us, at some time in our lives, have been in or certainly felt that we were in a situation of literal unpayable debt. We owed more than we could handle at the time and could not see a way out. It is a miserable state of being for responsible people because of the stress and anxiety of figuring out—not just how to make ends meet for the next day and the next—but for the wondering of whether or not you are ever going to get out from under so you can really live again.

There is also perceived unpayable debt. It is a debt, or maybe several debts—not monetary—that we owe another person. Or that we think we do. Perhaps someone has done us an extreme kindness and we are having difficulty accepting it for what it was...kindness. So we go around feeling that we owe that person. *Or* someone has helped us out in one way or another and *wants* us to feel indebted to them. We all know at least one person who has done this. "You owe me big time!" It can create a kind of slavery for the one who owes. Because they can feel indebted to the other person until that person lets them off the hook.

Then of course, there is the hulking shadow of that great big, giant, humongous unpayable debt. The one we might think we owe Jesus Christ for taking on the sin of the world and giving himself for us. For we can never repay that. But he has never asked us to. Nor will he. And the only way we can be free in the love of Jesus is to get past the idea of his death as our debt. If we cannot, then we cannot be truly in relationship with him. For his triumph was in his resurrection and his ability to take us along with him when the time comes. That is why Jesus' love gives us perfect freedom. And we will live in love with him if we truly practice that freedom.

With God, there is no unpayable debt; only unending love.

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