

"Plankton! Middle school science class. Plankton! That microscopic plant and animal life found floating in water. It attaches itself to a stick, leaf and goes with the current of the water. It has no direction of its own. In fact, another definition of the word is wandering.

Plankton has no order, no direction to its own life. It has no power to order its life. I am convinced that is the way many people live life. They are pushed along by the current of immediate events, culture, the world of advertisement, their own desire and need.

Many people have little control over their life because they live in poverty and have very little room and few resources to make a plan for ordering their life. Their life is consumed by the need to survive – food, shelter, clothing and maybe a little health care.

A student in my 6th grade prejudice reduction class responded to my request for some work to be done outside of class by saying that she had no time to do it. I asked if she had too much homework from her studies at school. She said, "I never do school homework. When I get home from school, I have to take care of my brothers and my sister who is nine months old." I asked about her mother. Her reply was, "My mother says that when she was my age she had to take care of her brothers and sisters. Now, I have to do the same." Her life is ordered all right. She has no hope that she can do anything about it.

The Mexican police in Tijuana, Mexico have a choice. They can take pay off money from the drug mafia or be killed. And taking the money doesn't mean that won't still get killed. Their life is ordered by some one beyond their control.

It is a blessed position to have the freedom to explore, experiment, to live toward a dream or hope you have for your life – to be able to order your life. I would say that most people in our world do not have that freedom. Their life is ordered by other people, circumstances beyond themselves.

Of course, we live in a country where dreams and hopes are common – and not beyond the scope of some who live in poverty. But there are ways we agree to live together that cause us to order our life together. We give up some of our ways for the common good of all.

We order our life to live in community.

I think one of the major outcomes of 9/11 is that the current administration has taken away many freedoms in the name of stopping terrorist. The government knows more and more about our private lives. Judges, who I think are there to administer justice in honesty and fairness, are dismissed because they did not push the cases the government wanted on the agenda. That agenda seems to have more to do with keeping power than in building, working for the common good.

Jesus is invited to lunch in the house of Simon, a Pharisee. Maybe we find that a little surprising because Jesus seems to be at odds with central ideas of faith that the Pharisees hold dear. They major on law instead of grace. I do like it that this story is recorded. It points out that Jesus had a relationship with the people with whom he differed – at least in the public eye. Some scholars think the Pharisee invited Jesus to his house for lunch to try to trap Jesus in a theological discussion. Others think the Pharisee invited Jesus to lunch because it would look good to the community. It would show the community that he was a good person to invite the young rabbi into his house for a meal.

During the meal this woman, "who is a sinner" – probably meaning a street person, a prostitute, comes into the house. How she got in I have no idea. Hard enough to figure out why the Pharisee invited Jesus. I do know that when a guest, such as Jesus, was in a town, the host would sometimes

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issue a blanket invitation for people to come by and ask questions. The text does not say how she knows Jesus is there. She has this alabaster jar of ointment and she is bathing Jesus' feet and drying them with her hair. The Pharisee who had invited Jesus is appalled! That Jesus would allow her to touch him is proof to the Pharisee that Jesus is no prophet. If he was a prophet then he would know what this woman is and would not allow her to touch him – at least not out in the public. Life for Simon is ordered – and good people do not associate with her kind. It goes against the order of society and it goes against the Pharisee's understanding that a prophet would know what kind of woman this was. So Simon deduces this man is not a prophet.

At this point, Jesus begins to question the way Simon has ordered life. Jesus tells him a story.

"Simon, a creditor has two debtors. One owes him 500 denari (500 days labor) and the other owes 50 denari (50 days work). When they could not pay, the creditor forgave the debt of both. Simon, which will love the creditor more?" Simon answers, "I suppose the one with the greater debt." Jesus said, "Simon, you are right!"

Do you see this woman? Can you see what she has done? Simon could have said no because he did not and could not see her. His world, his religion, his morality had ordered her out of life. She doesn't matter. To Simon, she is just a woman of the streets. Jesus goes to the heart of daily living together – ordered life. Any host would provide water for guest to take off sandals and wash dusty feet.

"Simon, you did not do this, but she has bathed and dried my feet with her hair."

Any host would have welcomed the guest with a kiss. "Simon, you did not welcome me with a kiss, but she has kissed my feet."

Any host would have anointed my head with oil. But she has anointed my feet with ointment. Her sins are great, she has shown great love. How do we appropriate this text into our lives today? There are two people who help us understand our ordered life in community.

One, the woman of the streets. She comes to ask Jesus to forgive her – and she has much to be forgiven for. The text is saying to us this day that God's love and forgiveness is greater than the mess we make with our lives. There are people in this room today who just need to put guilt down. We need to hear the words of Jesus, "Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more." Those words speak hope to our fearful lives, lives that the order we intended has been lost. "Woman, your trust in God is enough. God does love you and God does forgive you." All of us probably need to hear those very words speaking to us today.

Two, Simon the Pharisee. The message is for the church in our day. That word is that the church does not have the right to pronounce judgment on those broken by society, broken by wrong choices, broken because they live in poverty, broken because they do not have an education. The words to Simon speak to the church today. Open your eyes, open your heart, open your mind. See and welcome those who need to receive this forgiving love of God.

Ordered life includes a sense of community. We are not plankton. Our lives are not to be directed by current that has no sense of direction. We are called to be the People of God.