

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: July 17, 2022

“Shame”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost. This Sunday we have two readings that focus on two themes, one is hospitality and the other is female or gender expectations.

Now I do understand that Jesus wants us to be focused on our faith. He points to Mary’s decision that being focused on Jesus with devotion is a better choice than scrambling around with chores. And that Martha is unable to feel the Holy that is present right in front of her.

However, I want to go deeper into what spoke to me at this time in history. This may be something different than where most will focus, but in mind of trying to be a more compassionate people, please join me in my exploration.

We have Jesus visiting a home and we have two different women who react in their own way to his visit. One woman becomes busy with the business of hosting, while the other spends her time and attention sitting and listening to Jesus. We do have Jesus’ official response; that we should, in fact, focus ourselves on Jesus.

But just as the woman who rebuked Jesus about the crumbs under the table, I myself, would like to take Jesus to task today.

I want to just say that we need both types of women. We need the hostess to be busy with preparations and serving and we also need those who sit and listen to the one who is visiting, and sometimes one woman gets to handle all that at once.

This brings me to what we expect of women, though really all genders and honestly all of humanity, as we struggle with division in our country. But I'm going to begin with women. It seems the life decisions a woman makes never really have a better than shameful result.

Marrying or not, having children or not, focusing on a career or staying home; what type of career, even what type of clothing you wear - for most women these decisions have no right or wrong answer. But due to social stigma, women are often left feeling shame for their choices.

I would love to carry on the discussion with Jesus about needing both types of women. I would also remind him that today, Martha is the hostess; while tomorrow may be the day Martha takes the time to be devout and listen. Tomorrow, Mary may be doing the chores. And have mercy on Martha for asking for help. Come on ladies, we have all been there.

In fact, men, I am pretty sure there is a social stigma about asking for help, one that can often keep us from getting the assistance we really need. So there, female shame, male shame. I am sure any one of the gentlemen here today could come up and explain male expectations and social stigmas that have caused much pain. Pain that damages our relationships and our faith.

Clearview treatment programs (one of the leading programs helping people who struggle with both addiction and mental health problems) explains:

- *People who live with shame often avoid relationships, vulnerability, and community.* Research shows that shame leads people to hide and self-conceal. And if you are finding this in yourself or someone you know, please talk to someone.
- *People who live with shame are prone to suppressing their emotions.* Shame is associated with suppression of emotions, particularly in women, and occasionally in men, who feel they do not live up to their gender-expected standard.
- *People who live with shame often feel worthless, depressed, and anxious.* Shame can be a contributing factor in depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. People who are constantly ashamed live out a difficult emotional and mental battle in their mind and body, each and every day.
- *People who live with shame are less likely to take healthy risks.* One way that shame has been conceptualized is as “a defense against being devalued by others.” Often feeling, "Why should I bother?" This keeps one from moving forward in life.
- *Shame can be the reason people choose not to take steps toward healing.* People who live with shame believe they are worthless, and so they often begin to treat themselves as though they are worthless by engaging in behaviors that they know are bad for their health and well-being.

If any of this resonates with you, please know you are not alone, and there are some resources. And if it doesn't, take the information anyway, as you may need it at some other time in your life, maybe even for someone you love.

If you find yourself wondering if you are living with a degree of shame about your life decisions, there are some things you can do:

- *Seek out relationships and commit to vulnerability with safe people.* This is where church community comes in. Do everything in your power to find community. Shame begins to disappear when it is shared in a safe place.
- *Move out of your head and into the open.* Don't keep everything inside. Put your shame out into the world. Write about the shame. Share your story of shame. Create artwork that represents your shame. Shame finds healing when it is taken outside of ourselves and explored to locate its true context.
- *Develop self-compassion.* Consider what you would say to a friend who was feeling the same things you feel. Begin to respond to yourself with love and care and concern, just as you would respond to others with love and care and concern.
- *Take one small risk.* Attempt something that might end in failure. Do something that is difficult. You will either succeed and find hope that you can do more than you thought. Or, you might fail and realize that failure isn't the end of the world. Either way, you begin to find healing for your shame.
- *Believe that healing is possible.* Learn that life decisions are truly your choice and done in your own comfort level. You don't have to judge yourself the same way others might.

I am sure by now that Jesus would agree with me, and maybe approach Martha stating, "you are welcome to join us when you are ready." There is no shame in one choice over the other, just different opportunities.

Maybe Mary got to listen longer to Jesus that day, but perhaps when Jesus took a piece of bread from the meal she prepared, Martha got to make Jesus smile. Neither choice is wrong, or shameful, just a different expression of life. Let us all be more compassionate to ourselves and others, for that is really being focused and putting God and Jesus first. Amen.