



On your marks

Jesus was always surprising his followers and his critics by the way he welcomed the stranger, the outsider and the marginalised. God's love through Jesus reaches out to the ones that no one else bothered with, and so Jesus teaches us how to love our neighbour whoever they are.

In this story from Luke's Gospel, Jesus is invited to a dinner party that is interrupted by an outsider who gives him the love and welcome he should have received from his host. It seems the woman was a known prostitute but clearly she wanted to meet with Jesus, and the extravagant welcome and respect she offers Jesus prompts a story about love and forgiveness, which Simon the Pharisee will never have forgotten.

Get set

The story can be found in Luke 7:36-50. The following version of the story is a performance piece for an act of worship or a reflection on welcome, love and forgiveness. It was first written as an article for BRF's [Get Messy!](#) magazine in 2013 with the title 'Something messy and something missing'. It has particular resonance for those churches that are reaching out to the community through Messy Church.

You might find it helpful to introduce the story with some simple props - for example, a bottle of perfume and a bag of coins.

Go!

Simon says:

Once there was a man called Simon.
Simon says his house is grand.
Simon says he's good at entertaining.
Simon says he likes having special guests
Simon's feasts are famous, so Simon says.

Simon said, I'll ask Jesus to my home.
Simon said, all my friends should meet him.
Simon said, it must go like clockwork.
Simon said, people will enjoy my perfect, tidy meal.

Once there was a woman called... well...
No one knows what she was called. No one ever bothered to find out.
The woman doesn't go to the synagogue - she says they'll judge her.
The woman breaks the rules - she says they look down on her.
The woman is an outsider - she says no meals for her in respectable homes.



But the woman said, I want to change.
The woman said, I long for forgiveness.
The woman said, I need true love.
The woman said, I must meet Jesus.

Simon's meal is well under way.
There's eating, and drinking, and talking, and laughter.
The meal is going like clockwork, so perfect and tidy.
Simon says he's pleased.

The woman creeps in close to Jesus - only a few of them notice.
The woman is crying close to Jesus - some begin to whisper.
The woman is washing his feet with her tears - people are staring.
The woman is drying his feet with her hair - they've all stopped talking.
The woman anoints his feet with perfume - just listen to the gasps of disapproval!

This woman, they say, shouldn't be here.
This woman, they say, doesn't belong.
This woman, they say, should have stayed outside.
Doesn't this woman know who Jesus is, they say?

But Jesus stays calm.
Jesus says, I'll tell you a story about being let off two debts.
Jesus says, who's happier - someone let off a huge debt or someone let off a little?
Jesus says, he understands why she's there.
Jesus says, being forgiven is wonderful.
Jesus says, this is what leads to love.

At Simon's meal there had been eating, and drinking, and talking, and laughing.
But Jesus said there hadn't been her sort of welcome.
But Jesus said there hadn't been her sort of love.
But Jesus said there hadn't been her sort of faith.

Better the peace of a messy life made perfect,
Than a perfect meal messed up... So Jesus says.

And better a welcome from a messy life, but with love,
Than a tidy feast that is grand but loveless... so Simon says... now.