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## *Stop Making Assumptions*

**A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh**  
**Proper 6 – Year C**

A few weeks ago I was back at home in Tennessee. In my bedroom are two photographs from college; one hangs above the other.

One of my college traditions is to take a photo of your class the week of freshmen orientation and another photo four years later during the week of graduation.

So, I have both of those photos hanging in my room. The freshman photograph hanging above the senior photograph.

Every time I look at that freshman photograph, I am reminded about a message in today's gospel—"Stop Making Assumptions."

You see, I remember that day clearly. I had been at college a few days and my closest friends were the students living in my dorm and on my hall.

As fate would have it, most of the guys in my dorm happened to be 3-4 inches taller than me, and the girls were 3-4 inches shorter than me.

So, when it came time for the 400 member class photo, the photographer separated me from my friends and put me in another spot.

When I got to my new location, I remember the voices in my head: Who are these people? Where did they come from? I appear to have nothing in common with them. When will this photo be over?

Now, we have all been in similar situations. Think back to a time where you were around a dinner table, a work function, or a social event with people that you have never met.

Remember the thoughts that were going on in your head. It is likely you were thinking what I was thinking during that freshman photograph—you were making assumptions.

Notice that this is exactly what Simon does at this awkward dinner in today's gospel passage.

The scripture notes that Simon doesn't say what he is thinking, he merely thinks it. Yes, it was one of those voices in his head making assumptions about Jesus and the woman.

Poor Simon hadn't been to an Episcopal Church and prayed the collect for purity: "Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and no secrets are hid."

Simon gets called out on his assumption that Jesus isn't a prophet, and then Jesus takes him to school on the assumptions he makes about the woman.

God has a unique way of teaching us about making assumptions and quick judgments.

You see, that freshman photograph hanging on my bedroom wall is God's reminder to me about making assumptions and judging others.

Those weird people around me would later become my fraternity brothers, future roommates, and some of my dearest friends.

So, I look at that photo and am reminded about how quick I am to make assumptions and about how God calls us to seek out deeper relationships.

Moving beyond our assumptions is a theme throughout scripture.

Look at Paul in our text from Galatians. He says, I know you have assumptions about me because of my past, but God is doing something new in me—"I have been crucified with Christ ... it is no longer I who lives, but it is Christ who lives in me."

Look at Peter, who after denying Jesus three times must have had people making assumptions about his character. Yet, Jesus comes to him after the resurrection and says there is more to you than that mistake: Feed my lambs, Tend my sheep, Feed my sheep.

So, here is the bind: The Bible is full of stories where God judges a person by their character and faith, while we have a habit of making false assumptions and quick judgments.

We make assumptions about people every day, it is who we are, and how we have been raised. Remember what your parents and teachers taught you? "You never have a second chance to make a first impression."

Jesus wants to show Simon (and us) that this woman has a powerful story, but our assumptions and judgements have become a barrier to entering into a deeper relationship with others.

Jesus' frustration with Simon (and us) is that we sit at that table and never ask.

As Christians, we make vows to "seek and serve Christ in all persons." In order to seek and serve you must ask and listen to the story of others.

I get that this line from the Baptismal Covenant can be daunting to practice.

Our schedules are full, we live in a fast-paced world and we can't seek and serve everyone we encounter at Whole Foods.

Yet, I am not sure that is what Jesus intended.

Jesus' frustration in today's gospel is that we don't seek and serve those eating at the same table, with those whose office is across from ours, or those who live under our roof, or those we call our friends and loved ones.

If you took out your cell phone and looked at the list titled "Favorites," I imagine there is a lot of seeking and serving to be done with those names. We make assumptions about those people, without ever stopping to ask and listen.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, from your favorites to those you call the other?

For a minute, I want you to imagine if each week we spent some time with one person, just one person, and we moved from making assumptions about them to actually seeking, asking, listening, and possibly even serving them.

I imagine we would hear some powerful stories. I imagine we would have our perspectives broadened. I imagine that we would have our faith strengthened. I imagine we would hear about the presence of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others. I imagine that we would hear what Simon never gets to hear today.

And I know this to be true. I believe it with all my heart ... because I have a photograph ... one that was taken during my freshman year ... a photograph where I am surrounded by the saints of God ... and I didn't know it at the time ... because I was too busy making assumptions.

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