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Have you ever had one of these appear above your head? [*show thought balloon*] What is it? ... A thought balloon, little bubbles that show thoughts over the head of characters in cartoons. Just imagine what it would be like if all our opinions appeared in thought balloons. For example, what might your thought balloon show this morning?

[*Show thought balloons: I'm tired. What's for lunch?*]

I recently saw a cartoon with a thought balloon that said, "If everyone could read my thought balloons, *I'm in big trouble!*"

When reading a story, we're used to hearing the thoughts of the characters as they struggle to decide what to do, and in today's Gospel story from Luke, a thought bubble leaps off the page as Jesus has dinner with a Pharisee named Simon. He was an important religious leader, and Simon invited Jesus to his home for a meal. The narrator Luke tells us that a woman showed up at dinner, and then he creates tension in the story by telling us she's a "sinner." Luke doesn't go into any details of her

background, but he's quite explicit about her actions at the table, for she "came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume" (*The Message*, 7:37-38). Luke uses a series of verbs to describe her movements, as though the onlookers were intentionally watching every move she made. If this scene appeared in a modern day movie, the screen might show her actions in slow motion, highlighting each movement in detail.

And now a thought bubble appears in the story as Simon thinks to himself, "If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him" (7:39). As one commentator noticed,

In Mark's version, the onlookers object to the woman's actions "among themselves" (Mark 14:4), which implies that they spoke aloud ... rather than directly to Jesus. In Matthew, the disciples object openly (Matthew 26:28), and

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similarly, in John, Judas voices his concerns out loud (John 12:4-5). Only Luke highlights Simon's unspoken thoughts.¹

This is the first time in Luke's Gospel that a character "thinks to himself," but in all instances the characters were struggling with difficult decisions, often self-centered and *foolish*.²

As Simon is thinking to himself, Jesus seems to read his thought bubble, for he tells a story about two men who owed money to the bank. One owed 500 pieces of silver; the other 50 pieces. Neither could pay up, so the banker forgave both debts. Which one would be the most grateful?

How would you answer the question?

Simon suggested the one who owed 500 pieces of silver, the larger debt.

Jesus agreed, and then he replied, "Do you see this woman? I came to your home; you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for

freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume. Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. If the forgiveness is minimal, the gratitude is minimal" (*The Message*, Luke 7:44-47).

The woman needed much forgiveness, just as the man who owed 500 pieces of silver needed forgiveness. Jesus forgave her multitude of sins, and though the crowd mumbled their disapproval, Jesus told the woman to go in peace.

Luke's story invites us to consider our own thought bubbles in various situations, "What would I do?"

Imagine you're waiting for a train in a big city station and see a mother with two young crying children. What might your thought bubbles display? (Don't ruin my trip! or Keep them quiet!) One woman waiting for a train observed this scenario of: a young mother trying desperately to cope with two crying children and an armload of packages. She also saw a teenage girl sitting nearby who quickly went to the harried mother

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and offered to help by taking care of the children until the train arrived. The mother, delighted with this offer, gladly accepted and left to get a much-needed bite to eat. [Your thought bubble might read: "How irresponsible of that mother to leave her children with a stranger."] Shortly she returned and the teenager again offered her help in carrying the packages to the train. As the train pulled out of the station, she stood on the platform and waved good-bye.

The woman watching all of this now watched as the girl returned to the station lobby and shortly offered to help yet another mother with small children. This scene was repeated several times over....

The woman who had been watching all of this was both puzzled and fascinated as the same scenario unfolded several more times. [Thought bubble: ??] Finally she approached the girl, saying, "I'm curious. I've been watching you for an hour or so and you've spent the entire

time helping young mothers and their children. Why are you doing this?" To which the teenager replied, "Oh, I was one of five children. My dad was in the army and we were always moving from one place to another. My mom used to get so tired carrying the packages and suitcases and caring for all of us, and I always tried to help her. I remember her saying to me, 'You are so good with children.' My dad went to war in Europe and never came back, so that left mom alone. And she just recently died, so I thought 'Maybe I could do something for others because she said I was so good with kids.' I thought there would be a lot of tired mothers here so that's why I come to the depot. It makes me feel good. It really helps."³

This woman and teenage girl had their thought bubbles transformed. Rather than judging crying and restless children, the teenager instead saw an opportunity to help. Jesus did a similar thing when he invited Simon to change his thought bubble from one of judgment to one of acceptance. Rather than

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focusing on the sin of the woman, Jesus offered the thought bubble of grace.

We all find ourselves in trouble at one time or another, wondering what to do, as did Mrs. Rhoda, a 62-year old widow, mother, and grandmother, who lives in...Zimbabwe... Her family was identified as *nutritionally vulnerable*. [Through Week of Compassion] she was among the first to build a key-hole garden with the help of a cluster of local farmers. Key-hole gardens are an effective tool for increasing household nutrition because they require minimal acreage and use raised vegetable beds that retain water efficiently and protect crops from damage during floods.

When the gardens are built, households receive starter seeds for mineral-rich vegetables

such as spinach, beans, squash, and tomatoes. For Mrs. Rhoda, having a ready source of nutritious food for her family [WOC has helped transform her thought bubble to] “feels like a huge *burden has been lifted from my shoulders*.”⁴

Jesus invited Simon to examine his own thought bubble, to move from judgment to grace, from exclusion to inclusion. Through our WOC offerings, we help people living in disasters or difficult situations to move from thought bubbles of *despair* to thought bubbles of *hope* by providing them the tools to create a better life.

While thinking to ourselves, Jesus invites us to examine our own thought bubbles and transform them from judgment into grace, from despair into hope.

¹www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3004

² Luke 12.17, 45; 15.17-19; 16.4-7; 18.18.4-5; 20.13.

³ David Dunn, *Try Giving Yourself Away: A Tonic for These Troubled Times*, as quoted on HomileticsOnline.com.

⁴ www.weekofcompassion.org/our-impact/