



Bringing the Text into View

While the practice of reading actually engages all three worlds of the Bible at once, focusing primarily on one dimension of a biblical passage at a time makes the work of exegesis and interpretation much more clear. For sermon preparation, working in this way will make it easier for preachers to determine what aspect of the passage should ultimately serve as the thematic anchor of the sermon. Thus, with one eye on the pulpit, this chapter provides readers a guide for performing a close reading of the literary world *of* the text. We begin with the literary world of the text, which ought always to serve as the central orientation of exegesis, so that we do not unwittingly add to the text what is not there. Accountability to the literary world of the text is what most distinguishes exegesis from eisegesis.

The importance of the literary world is underscored by a key presupposition of biblical studies, namely, that biblical literature is the product of purposeful composition. None of the books of the Bible is a haphazard collection of thoughts and traditions. Rather, they are intentional and well-crafted writings. Bearing in mind that the overwhelming majority of the ancient world was nonliterate and that literature was read aloud to the masses, it is easy to recall both that those who knew how to write were among the elite and that writing was neither a common nor casual endeavor. The books of the Bible were written and edited by persons who brought intentionality and rhetorical skill to the tasks of composition and redaction. If for no other reason, readers

ought to give close attention to the literary world of the Bible out of respect for the distinctiveness of each writing.

The overarching goal of examining the literary world of the text is to get the text in view and bring it into clearer focus. When an author composes a text, he or she constructs a literary world that includes textual markers and constraints that readers may recognize and with which they may interact. The author cannot control how readers actualize a text. How a passage is constructed in the reader's mind's eye depends upon the reader him- or herself. At first glance, this may seem so obvious that it should warrant little or no discussion. As is the case with many everyday activities, however, the commonplace often conceals a host of small but nonetheless important choices and decisions that we make. In both the everyday habits that we perform and the process of reading, such choices are replete with meaning that we assume and upon which we act. In other words, although reading is something that we do everyday, it is actually a very complex process. When we read the Bible, we are not just taking in words on a page. We are putting the words together, assigning meaning to them, and constructing with them a coherent form, such as a story, hymn, speech, or argument, in our mind's eye. As recent literary theory and biblical scholars have observed, reading is not a passive endeavor. By themselves, words on a page are simply marks on paper or pixels on a screen. It takes a reader to bring them to life. Thus, reading is a process of active engagement, one that we can describe as a reader's work in constructing a text, as well as his or her response to it.

This phenomenon, the construction of a text and its meaning, is well known to anyone who has visited a locale where one is unfamiliar with the dominant spoken language. The sounds of the unknown language, the gestures of its people, and the written word are simply that—undecipherable sounds, gestures, and marks on a page. In that rather lonely circumstance, a visitor recognizes that if he or she only knew the native language, then he or she would be able to “put together”—that is, construct in his or her mind's eye—what was being communicated. Reading the Bible is no different. In its original form, it is written in the languages of different and very ancient cultures that are unknown to the overwhelming majority of its readers. Most people read, or hear the Bible read, in translation. In chapter 3 we will turn to the question of the ancient context of biblical literature, but

for now, let us examine how to bring the literary world of the translated text into clearer view. Even in English translation, the biblical text requires that we give our attention to how we read and what we make of a passage as we engage it. The discussion that follows focuses on an English translation of the Bible, namely, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), but the process that is recommended here is applicable to reading the Bible in its original language, translations other than English, and editions besides the NRSV.

Beginning a Close Reading of the Text

A close reading of a text begins with a narrow focus on the specific biblical passage, or pericope, that is under primary consideration.¹ Then the reader gradually widens his or her focus in order to understand better how the pericope relates to its larger literary context. The following steps describe how to get started:

1. Bring the Text into View

- Whether or not one is preparing to preach an already defined lectionary text, the first step in conducting a close reading of a biblical passage involves determining its genre or literary form. Is your passage either part of a story or a story itself? Is it an argument or illustration within a letter? Is it a hymn or an exposition? This is an important, if very basic, question to ask, for genre goes a long way towards shaping a reader's expectations.
- Identify the implied setting of the passage as well as the persons or characters that appear in it. Where does the passage take place? According to whose perspective, or point of view, is the text written? Make a list of the persons or characters or groups of characters whom you are able to name.
- Examine the contours of your passage—its beginning, middle, and ending. This will help you obtain a sense of the flow and logic of the passage. Try to determine why the passage has been delimited by its opening and closing verses. Often, the opening verse will signal a shift in time, setting, or action. Sometimes the closing verse resolves

the action preceding it, provides a short summary statement, or is followed by a verse that indicates a new shift in setting, time, or action and the beginning of a new pericope.

- Once the beginning and ending of the passage have been established, determine the flow of the middle unit or units. Outline the structure of the passage, from beginning to end, in a way that makes sense to you. Soon you will begin to see more clearly how the sequence of the passage serves the argument or illustration it presents, the story it narrates, or the poetry or hymn it contains.
- Identify what you see as the key topic(s), theme(s), and/or conflict(s) that emerge in the passage. Pay special attention to the repetition of terms or the development of a topic within the pericope. If, at this point, you find your understanding of the passage's structure shifting a bit, that is fine. Indeed, you may find yourself revising your conceptualization of the passage more than once as you make your way through this close reading.

Shifting to a Wide-Angle Lens

Once you have established a clearer sense of the passage, you can widen your viewing lens and begin considering the pericope in its larger literary context.

2. Reading the Text in its Literary Context

First, focus only on your passage's immediate context within the biblical book in which it appears.

- How is your passage related to the verses that precede and follow it? Is it part of a larger argument, poem, or narrative sequence? If so, does it occur as part of the beginning, middle, or ending of that immediate sequence?
- How are the themes and conflicts in your passage (see above) introduced, developed, and/or resolved in that broader literary context?

After you have examined your passage in its immediate context, you may widen your reading lens even more to consider its relationship to the entire biblical book in which your passage appears.

- In what part of the biblical book (beginning, middle, or ending) does your passage appear?
- How are the themes and conflicts in your passage (see above) introduced, developed, and/or resolved in the biblical book you are reading? Note that your responses here may be similar to those you have previously named, but you should be focusing on different textual material in the overall book as you make the connections between your primary passage and the book as a whole.
- Are the characters that appear in your passage introduced earlier in the book? If so, how do you assess each of the characters in the material leading up to, and then at the conclusion of, your passage?

3. Optional: Placing the New Testament Text in Conversation with the Old Testament, as the Text Requires

Finally, in the case of New Testament exegesis, you may note what scholars call an “intertextual” relationship between your New Testament pericope and the Jewish Bible, or the Christian Old Testament. However, this will not always be the case. Intertextual material refers to content in the New Testament that is drawn from the Jewish Scriptures. It can pertain to quotations that are explicitly cited by a New Testament writer or to images, practices, teachings, and characters in the Jewish Bible to which a New Testament text either directly refers or indirectly alludes. Strictly speaking, observations about intertextual material underscore the intersection between the historical world of a New Testament text (which acknowledges the overall relationship between the New Testament and the Jewish Bible) and its literary world (which focuses on information gleaned from the text). When performing a close reading of a New Testament passage, it is helpful to examine any intertextual dimension of the text at this stage of exegesis.

- Does your passage quote, refer, or allude to material from the Jewish Scriptures? If so, identify the books, chapters,

and verses of the passages to which the New Testament text is pointing.

- Examine each reference to the Jewish Bible, its original literary context. Identify what each Old Testament passage addresses or conveys.
- Now return to the New Testament passage and examine how it incorporates, changes, and/or makes use of the Old Testament tradition to which it refers. Consider how the older material gives shape to the New Testament text.

After reading the text closely in its immediate and broader literary contexts, step back and take one more comprehensive look at the passage. You may find the text even richer than before and, with each new reading, coming to life in a way that makes the text fresh and more accessible to you as you look ahead to the pulpit, the goal of your exegetical work.

Case Study: Luke 7:36-50

What follows is a close reading of a Gospel text, Luke 7:36-50, the scene in which a woman anoints Jesus' feet, followed by a wide-angle reading. As we examine throughout this book the various dimensions of biblical literature, we will return again to this Lukan passage. In so doing, we will see how even a brief exploration of the three worlds of a Scripture text can open it up in new and exciting ways for the preacher. Please note that this engagement of Luke 7:36-50 does not provide a definitive reading of the text, nor does it exhaust the approach outlined above. For instance, this particular Lukan passage does not include an explicit Old Testament intertextual dimension. The reading that follows here is offered in the hope that it will serve as an exegetical illustration which will encourage you to take up biblical exegesis with greater confidence and clarity about its purpose and usefulness.

A Close Reading of Luke 7:36-50

³⁶One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind him at his feet,

weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.” ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “speak.” ⁴¹“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” ⁴⁴Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” ⁴⁸Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

1. Bringing Luke 7:36-50 into View

We begin by considering the question of genre. The story that Luke tells here is not only part of a larger narrative, namely, Luke’s Gospel, it also contains within itself a smaller story, or parable, that Jesus recounts in vv. 41-42. The setting of the passage, the home of a Pharisee (later identified in v. 40 as Simon), is explicitly stated in v. 36, “One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table.” The characters in the passage are: Jesus, Simon, and an unnamed woman (introduced in v. 37). The point of view from which the passage is recounted is that of the Gospel’s narrator. The brief parable in vv. 41-42 is told from the point of view of Jesus, the protagonist of the Luke’s entire story.

The passage unfolds in a very interesting way. The opening verse (v. 36) signals an abrupt change of subject and setting. Following Jesus’ closing statement in v. 50, another abrupt change of subject in the summary statement of 8:1 opens a new passage. Thus, the boundaries

of its opening and closing verses clearly demarcate Luke 7:36-50 as a discrete pericope.

As the passage unfolds, readers may notice repeated shifts in foci. When one outlines the structure of Luke 7:36-50 accordingly, the following emerges:

I. Beginning (7:36-38)

- 7:36—Introduction to Jesus dining with the Pharisee and others.
- 7:37-38—Focus on the woman and her actions toward Jesus.

II. Middle (7:39-47)

- 7:39—Transitional statement (“Now when . . .”) shifting focus from the woman and her actions toward Jesus to Simon and his thoughts about Jesus.
- 7:40-43—Focus on dialogue between Jesus and Simon. Contains Jesus’ parable in vv. 41-42.
- 7:44-47—Focus on Jesus’ gesture toward the woman and his words to Simon that compare the woman’s actions toward Jesus to those of Simon.

III. Ending (7:48-50)

- 7:48—Focus on Jesus’ initial words to the woman.
- 7:49—Focus on the response of others at the table with Jesus.
- 7:50—Focus on Jesus’ final words to the woman.

When the passage is viewed as it is above, readers can see that the pericope includes two instances, not just one, of a story-within-a-story. As has been mentioned, the first instance occurs when Jesus briefly recounts the parable of a creditor and two debtors in vv. 41-42. The second example consists of the way in which Jesus’ dialogue with Simon is framed by Jesus’ encounter with the unnamed woman. Whereas Jesus’ parable brings into sharper relief his dialogue with

Simon, so does Jesus' conversation with Simon interpret the interaction between him and the woman.

2. Topics, Themes, or Conflicts

Having noted the relationship between different parts of the passage, we may now turn to the key topics, themes, or conflicts that catch our attention. As repetition of phrases and topics sustains readers' and listeners' attention, the following can be observed as particular emphases of the passage:

I. Beginning (7:36-38)

³⁶One of the Pharisees *asked Jesus to eat with him*, and he went into the Pharisee's house and *took his place at the table*. ³⁷And a **woman in the city, who was a sinner**, having learned that he was *eating in the Pharisee's house*, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She **stood behind him at his feet, weeping**, and began to **bathe his feet with her tears** and to **dry them with her hair**. Then she **continued kissing his feet** and **anointing them with the ointment**.

- Jesus is in the home of a Pharisee (vv. 36, 37; underlined).
- Jesus is engaging in table fellowship with the Pharisee (vv. 36, 37; in italics).
- The woman is unnamed, but repeatedly identified as a woman "in the city" and as one "who was a sinner" (v. 37; in bold).
- The passage is interested in the woman's position, her actions toward Jesus, and her physical contact with him (v. 38; in bold and underlined).

II. Middle (7:39-47)

³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "IF THIS MAN WERE A PROPHET, he would have known **who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.**"

⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "TEACHER," he replied, "speak." ⁴¹"A certain creditor had two debtors; one

owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴**Then turning toward the woman**, he said to Simon, "**Do you see this woman?** I entered your house; *you gave me no water for my feet*, but **she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair**. ⁴⁵*You gave me no kiss*, but from the time I came in **she has not stopped kissing my feet**. ⁴⁶*You did not anoint my head with oil*, but **she has anointed my feet with ointment**. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, **her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love**. But *the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little*."

- Following the reminder that the Pharisee invited Jesus into his home (v. 39), there is sustained focus on the dialogue between Jesus and Simon (vv. 40, 43, 44, 47; underlined).
- References to Jesus' identity and character (vv. 39, 40, 49; in caps).
- Emphasis on the unnamed woman's character as one with many sins (vv. 39, 44, 47; in bold).
- Focus on the actions toward Jesus that Simon does not perform (vv. 44, 45, 46, 47; in italics and underlined).
- Repeated emphasis on the woman's position, her actions toward Jesus and her physical contact with him (vv. 39, 44, 45, 46, 47; in bold and underlined).

III. Ending (7:48-50)

⁴⁸Then he said to her, "**Your sins are forgiven**." ⁴⁹But *those who were at the table with him* began to say among themselves, "WHO IS THIS who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace**."

- The focus shifts to what Jesus says to the woman, not Simon (vv. 48, 50; underlined).

- Focus on the unnamed woman's character as one whose sins are forgiven and whose faith has saved her (vv. 48, 50; in bold).
- A final reminder that Jesus is practicing table fellowship with Simon and others (v. 49; in italics).
- A final reference to Jesus' identity (v. 49; in caps).

3. Summary of Observations

Even a brief rereading of Luke 7:36-50 goes a long way toward bringing this passage into clearer view. At least four observations can be made at this point. First, the table fellowship that figures so prominently determines both the scene's setting and the context for evaluating the interaction between the Lukan characters. Thus, a theme that emerges in this particular setting is that of "place." Jesus takes "his place at the table" (lit. "reclined") in the opening verse (v. 36) and there is repeated interest in the woman's place, both literally (she stands behind Jesus in v. 38) and figuratively (in v. 39, Simon presumes to know just "what kind of woman this is").

Second, the passage also focuses repeatedly on the evaluation of the unnamed woman's character and reputation. The narrative creates a sharp distinction between Simon the Pharisee and the woman. Yet, even independent of such contrast, the text draws the reader's eye to its description of the woman. She is identified not only as "a woman" but as a woman "of the city" and "a sinner" (v. 37). Furthermore, as the narrative juxtaposes interest in Simon's thoughts and dialogue with Jesus with its steady focus on the woman's physical interaction with Jesus, the reader continues to "see" the woman. Jesus' question to Simon in v. 44, "Do you see this woman?" may be heard as somewhat redundant by the reader.

Third, the concentrated description of the woman's actions in v. 38 emphasizes the physical, even sensual, nature of her interaction with Jesus. Insofar as it follows the introduction of the woman as a "sinner," a reader assimilating the narrator's descriptors may tend to associate the woman's reputation with her behavior toward Jesus. Furthermore, the narration of Simon's thoughts in v. 39, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner," certainly encourages the reader to view the woman with disdain and her actions as offensive. Simon's

assessment of the woman also determines his view of Jesus, one that obviously turns negative. In Simon's eyes, Jesus has proven himself not to be a prophet.

The passage features sharp commentary in vv. 44-46 that not only reframes the woman's actions as expressions of hospitality rather than offense, it contrasts them precisely to what is lacking in Simon's response to Jesus. Jesus' words reveal the abundant love that the woman demonstrates (v. 47) and implicate the emptiness of Simon's own thinking. As the scene draws to its conclusion, it repeats the motif of forgiveness (vv. 48-50) and love (v. 47) that first appears in the brief parable which Jesus tells in vv. 41-43. Thus, what begins as a story hinting at scandal ends as a tale that exemplifies love and gratitude.

Finally, with Jesus' final words to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50), the scene establishes the unnamed woman as an exemplar of faith. Since the concept of "faith" is introduced at this moment in the episode, readers may look to the information the scene provides to determine of what the woman's faith consists. With its emphatic reference to the woman's actions ("she has shown great love," v. 47) the account associates faith with both the acceptance of forgiveness and the response of love. Thus, what sets the woman apart from Simon is both her vision of Jesus as more than an honored guest and her response to him. She sees that Jesus is indeed not only a prophet (contra Simon's conclusion in v. 39 that Jesus is not), but also one who extends forgiveness. It is faith in such acceptance and forgiveness that generates the woman's response to Jesus and, even more to the point, brings her to wholeness (v. 50).

This discussion represents only some of the observations that a close reading of the pericope of Luke 7:36-50 can yield. Since what readers will note in their engagement of the passage will vary considerably, it is important to keep in mind that the aim of this exercise is not to arrive at a definitive understanding of the pericope. Rather, the purpose of reading the text closely is to sharpen the reader's sense of the passage in order to facilitate an interpretation that maintains an intimate relationship to the text.

A Wide-Angle Reading of Luke 7:36-50 in its Literary Context

When we place our reading of Luke 7:36-50 in a broader context, namely, that of the Gospel as a whole, we can see how the topics and

interests of the pericope relate to themes that permeate Luke's story of Jesus. The scene occurs in the Lukan narration of Jesus' Galilean ministry. Later Jesus will begin his journey south toward Jerusalem, but at this point in the story, Jesus is carrying out his ministry in the region that surrounds the Sea of Galilee. He is accompanied by a growing number of disciples, including the Twelve.

Although Luke 7:36-50 is a discrete passage, it can be read in relation to the narrative sequence in which it is immediately situated, Luke 7:18-50. In the midst of the exchange that occurs between Jesus and John's disciples in the opening part of this section, Luke 7:18-23, Jesus says: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me" (vv. 22-23). Afterward, when Jesus turns to the crowd that is with him, he says of John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet." (vv. 24-26). To this, Jesus adds, "I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (v. 28).

In Luke 7:31-32, Jesus compares "the people of this generation" to "children sitting in the marketplace" whose expectations not only go unmet but who also grossly misinterpret what it is they see: "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (vv. 33-34).

Thus, in Luke 7:18-35, Jesus speaks to themes that reverberate throughout his exchange with Simon. Jesus repeatedly refers to "seeing" from the first scene in this larger narrative sequence ("Go and tell John what you have seen and heard," 7:22) to the last ("Do you see this woman?" 7:47). What Luke's Jesus emphasizes throughout is the importance of *really seeing*, that is, of truly understanding what one witnesses. When Simon judges negatively both the unnamed woman and Jesus, readers may be reminded of Jesus' preceding statement that "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense" at him and his provision of healing and

good news (7:22-23). When Simon's responses to the unnamed woman and Jesus are read in light of Luke 7:18-35, he illustrates the very one who misapprehends and takes offense at the interaction between them.

The themes and motifs that appear in Luke 7:18-50 also occur in the Gospel as a whole. Indeed, all of the canonical Gospels make metaphorical use of sense perception, especially hearing and seeing, to express faith and understanding. As New Testament scholar Barbara Reid has observed, "Luke uses 'seeing' as a metaphor for perceiving the word of God" throughout the Gospel (see, for example, Luke 2:20, 30-31; 4:18).² The contrast between how the woman and Simon see Jesus, and how Jesus and Simon see the woman, develops Luke's emphasis on the need to "see" and understand. It also underscores the Gospel's concern for the "blindness" and ignorance that Jesus encounters throughout his ministry, and finally, in his death. However, in a Gospel that also emphasizes divine forgiveness, especially for what is done out of ignorance (Luke 23:34), readers may need to be careful not to assume that Luke 7:36-50 pronounces upon Simon absolute condemnation. For the Gospel does not narrate Simon's response to Jesus' teaching. It only lays before the reader the contrast between the woman's and Simon's initial responses to Jesus. It is the illustration of such contrast in which the narrative appears most interested.

Of course, Luke's preceding chapters also lend shape to how readers assess and "see" the characters that appear in Luke 7:36-50. By Luke 7:36, Luke has portrayed his protagonist, Jesus, as Son of God (Luke 1:35) who, filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18), embodies and proclaims the good news (Luke 4:18) of the kingdom of God. Although Simon has not appeared previously in Luke, the Pharisees and other religious leaders have. Thus, when Simon is introduced as "one of the Pharisees" (Luke 7:36), he is cast among a group that figures prominently in Luke's Gospel. Although Luke's portrayal of the Pharisees is far from static, recurring motifs of the proximity, controversy, and contention between Jesus and the religious leaders permeate the narrative nonetheless. By Luke 7, readers are prepared to anticipate tension in the relationship between Simon and Jesus.

Taking stock of Luke's portrayal of Jesus and the Pharisees casts into greater relief the characterization of the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-50. When she first appears in the story, she is portrayed as a sinful woman. But as it unfolds, Luke's narration recasts her as a model

of love, faith, and redemption. Together the woman and Simon form a pair that illustrates what Jesus' mother, Mary, sang about in her hymn to God. Indeed, Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46b-52) could easily be recast as the song of the unnamed woman of Luke 7:36-50:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
 He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly . . ."

At this juncture, we should consider whether Luke 7:36-50 has an important intertextual relationship with the Old Testament. Does it quote, cite, or allude to any biblical passage in particular? And if so, how does Luke 7:36-50 make use of the Old Testament material to which it refers? Does it simply incorporate the older material, or does it reframe or change the meaning of the biblical image or idea on which it draws? If we find that our pericope does make specific and significant use of the Old Testament, then we will want to examine what this intertextual dimension of Luke 7:36-50 suggests.

When we place our passage next to the Old Testament, we can consider, for instance, whether the gesture of foot washing or the offense that Simon takes at Jesus' reception of the woman's touch bears meaning owing specifically to a particular biblical text or tradition. Does the image of the woman washing Jesus' feet recall the language of foot washing in Genesis (i.e., Gen. 18:4, 19:2, 24:32)? Does Simon's response to Jesus echo Levitical teaching about unintentionally coming into contact with human uncleanness (Lev. 5:3)? Whereas Genesis confirms the hospitality that the provision of water to wash one's feet expresses, it does not add significant nuance to our reading of Luke 7:36-50. Leviticus, which promises that the one who unknowingly

comes into contact with uncleanness can attain atonement, addresses a concern that stands quite apart from Simon's. For the host's silent protest is rooted not in concern for Jesus, but in the ignorance that Simon presumes on the part of Jesus. It is Jesus' seeming lack of perception that scandalizes Simon. Many times, intertextual examination of a New Testament passage is fruitful. However, this is not always the case. With intertextual exploration of Luke 7:36-50 adding little to the interpretation of the passage for sermon preparation, the preacher should move on to the next stage of exegesis.

Conclusion

The literary world of the Bible is a product of the author's composition and the reader's actualization of it. The meanings that readers find in the biblical writings may indeed correspond to whatever their authors intended, but they may also extend far beyond what the ancient writers could have ever imagined. As canonical literature, the biblical text is highly delimited, but its interpretation remains quite fluid. In preparation for preaching, attention to the literary world of the text is not a means for arriving at a definitive interpretation of a biblical text. It is, rather, a means of forging an intimate relationship between the sermon and the Bible. The more you, the reader, lives with the text, the more grounded your sermon will be in it, and the more alive the biblical text will become for your congregation.