

Good News: Love of God and Neighbor

Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 7:36-50 Matthew 25:31-46
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
March 1, 2026

There is something vulnerable about sitting at a table. To share a meal is to reveal who belongs and who does not. It is to draw lines—sometimes gently, sometimes harshly—about who is welcome, who is respectable, who is worthy of a seat.

In Luke's gospel, Jesus is invited to dinner at the home of Simon, a Pharisee. The table is carefully arranged. The guest list is respectable. The conversation is no doubt thoughtful, theological, refined. And then—without warning—**the wrong person walks in**. Luke describes her simply as “a woman in the city, who was a sinner.” We are not told her name. We are told her reputation. She enters uninvited. She carries an alabaster jar of expensive perfume. She kneels behind Jesus, weeping. Her tears fall onto his feet. She wipes them with her hair. She kisses them. She anoints them with perfume. The room stiffens.

Simon recoils. Not out loud—at least not at first—but in his heart. If this man were a prophet, he thinks, he would know what kind of woman this is. The table that once felt secure now feels threatened. Boundaries are being crossed. Rules are being broken. This is a party foul of the highest order.

But **Jesus sees something entirely different**. He tells a story—because Jesus so often answers judgment with a story. Two people owe a debt. One owes much. One owes little. Neither can repay it. The creditor forgives them both. “Which of them will love him more?” Jesus asks. Simon answers cautiously, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus says, “You have judged rightly.” But here is the turn: Jesus reorients the table. He shifts the spotlight. He asks Simon to truly see the woman.

“Do you see this woman?” Not do you see her reputation? Not do you see her sin? Not do you see her intrusion? Do you see her? Because **what Jesus sees is not a scandal. He sees hospitality**. “I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet. But she has bathed my feet with her tears. You gave me no kiss. But from the time I came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil. But she has anointed my feet with perfume.” In other words: **Simon, you knew the rules of the law. But she practiced the law of love.**

When Jesus is asked elsewhere to summarize the law, he gives us what we call **the Greatest Commandment: Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself**. We often separate those two loves, as if one were vertical and the other horizontal. Love God in prayer. Love neighbor in service. Two separate movements. But Jesus never separates them. In this story, the woman's love for Jesus—

her devotion, her gratitude, her vulnerability—is also an act of neighbor-love. It is an act of hospitality. It is a refusal to let dignity be denied. She sees that Jesus has been slighted, and she responds with extravagant care. **Her love for God overflows into love embodied.**

And **Simon**? He has the theology. He has the structure. He has the correct seating arrangement. But somewhere along the way, **he has forgotten that loving God always takes flesh in how we treat the person in front of us. Can we truly love God if we do not love our neighbor? Isn't loving our neighbor one of the most concrete ways we honor the image of God within them?** Jesus seems to think so.

Jesus says of the woman, “Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love.” Great love. Not cautious love. Not respectable love. Not love that checks with the host first. **Great love.** The Greek word implies abundance—overflowing, excessive. It is the kind of love that does not count the cost before pouring out the perfume. And that is precisely what makes it uncomfortable. Because **extravagant love disrupts our neat categories. It exposes how often we ration compassion. It challenges our quiet calculations about who deserves what.** The woman will not let her love be limited—by her past, by Simon's judgment, by the unspoken rules of the room. She risks humiliation. She risks rejection. She risks being misunderstood. And in doing so, she embodies the very heart of the gospel: grace received becomes love poured out.

If Luke 7 shows us love at a dinner table, Matthew 25 shows us love on a cosmic scale. “When I was hungry, you gave me food. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothing. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.” And when the righteous ask, “Lord, when did we see you?” Jesus answers, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me.”

Do you hear the echo? In Luke, Jesus asks Simon, “Do you see this woman?” In Matthew, Jesus asks us, “Do you see me—in them?” The hungry. The stranger. The imprisoned. The unhoused. The addict. The refugee. The immigrant. The one with the complicated past. **Do you see this person? Because loving God and loving neighbor are not two separate commandments stitched awkwardly together. They are one seamless garment. To love the image-bearer is to love the One whose image they carry.**

When we care for the least of these, we are kneeling again at Jesus' feet. When we offer hospitality to the stranger, we are pouring perfume on Christ. When we refuse to reduce a person to their worst moment, we are practicing great love.

The genius of this text is that it does not let us sit comfortably. Some days we are the woman—aware of our need for grace, desperate to express gratitude, clinging to mercy. Some days we are Simon—confident in our correctness, unsettled by disruption, tempted to judge from the safety of our seat. And perhaps the Spirit's question to us today is the same one Jesus asked then: Do you see this woman? Do we see the humanity behind the headline? Do we see the sacred worth beneath the stigma? Do we notice where hospitality has been withheld—and where we are being invited to offer it? Because it is entirely possible to host Jesus and miss him at the same time. **It is entirely possible to talk about God and fail to love the person at our feet.** It is entirely possible to keep a respectable table while grace is happening on the floor.

The good news in this story is not only that the woman is forgiven. **The good news is that love—great love—is possible for all of us. Grace precedes it. Grace fuels it. Grace**

makes it extravagant. We love because we have been loved. We forgive because we have been forgiven. We welcome because we have been welcomed. The question is not whether we know the Greatest Commandment. The question is whether we will embody it. Will we risk loving beyond what is polite? Will we expand the table? Will we see Christ in the least of these? Because every time we choose mercy over judgment, hospitality over exclusion, dignity over dismissal, we are loving God with our whole heart, soul, and mind. And we are loving our neighbor as ourselves.

May we be a people known not merely for correct belief, but for great love.

Amen.

Resources:

A Sanctified Art, Lent 2026

Chatgpt