

Second Sunday of Lent - March 1, 2026

Video Online Bible Study with Rev. Gary E. Mathiesen

“Tell Me Something Good”

~ *Grounding Ourselves in the Good News of Lent* ~ “The Good News Is ... Great Love For God & Neighbor”

Luke 7:36-50 (Matthew 23:35-40)

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ LUKE 7:36-50 ~ “THE WOMAN WITH THE ALABASTER JAR”

~ THE PRELIMINARIES ~

☞ Variations of this event are recorded in all four gospels ... Luke departs from the event as recorded in the other three gospels as follows:

Matthew 26:6-13

- * Occurs in Bethany (region of Judea)
- * Comes after Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem
- * Home of Simon the Leper
- * Perfume poured on Jesus’ head by a woman
- * Complaint by disciples as waste
- * Jesus accepts this act as preparation for his burial

Mark 14:3-9

- * Occurs in Bethany (region of Judea)
- * Comes after Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem
- * Home of Simon the Leper
- * Perfume poured on Jesus’ head by a woman
- * Complaint by people as waste
- * Jesus accepts this act as preparation for his burial

John 12:1-8

- * Occurs in Bethany (region of Judea)
- * Comes before Jesus enters Jerusalem
- * Home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary (?)
- * Perfume poured on Jesus’ feet by Mary
- * Complaint by Judas Iscariot as waste
- * Jesus accepts this act as preparation for his burial

Luke 7:36-50

- * Occurs somewhere in the region of Galilee
- * Comes toward the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee
- * Home of Simon the Pharisee

- * Perfume poured on Jesus’ feet by a “sinful” woman
- * Complaint (to himself) by Simon the Pharisee as disgraceful and unclean
- * Jesus accepts this act as expression of love and contrition

~ THE SETTING ~



☞ v. 1 “Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him ...”

* “... the Pharisees ...” - We later get his name: Simon (v. 40). Not sure of his motivation to host Jesus: to learn from him (see Lk 5:33 and the question about fasting/praying) or to entrap him (see Lk 5:21 and the debate of the forgiveness of sins; also, Lk 6:11 and the debate of healing on the Sabbath). Pharisee means “*separated ones*”; they were few in number throughout the Holy Land at the time of Jesus. As a “grass roots” movement of the laity that took shape about 100 years before Jesus’ time, they were teachers of the law and saw themselves as religious examples of the Mosaic Law (God’s grace was extended only to those who kept God’s law). They had the broad support of the people and influenced popular opinion and national policy. They were particularly passionate about living righteously before God in a

world that was drifting away from the teachings of Moses and the authority of the oral traditions of the rabbis handed down through time.

* “... invited Jesus to have dinner ...” Once again, as was the case in the text from our first Sunday of lent (wedding at Cana), we are as guest at a dinner setting of hospitality. Location is not known but we are in Galilee (see map).

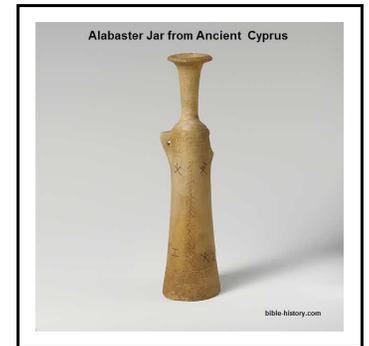
* "... so [Jesus] went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table." In Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures, this was the common dining posture where people lay on their left elbow on couches or cushions around a low table with the feet extended away from the table (and food!). This allowed for deep, comfortable conversation and symbolizing freedom and fellowship. This posture around the table signified relaxation, security, and wealth.

~ THE UNEXPECTED GUEST ~

☞ v. 37 "... a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume ..."

* Sinful Woman - A term of derision to indicate a person living outside God's law. In reference to this woman, it would indicate a person in the sex trade. A sinful person would have been someone avoided at all costs ... meaning having no contact either verbally or come in physical contact. To do so would have made a person "unclean" and would require purification.

* Alabaster Jar - Alabaster jars in ancient times were highly prized, durable, and often translucent containers crafted from calcite or gypsum, primarily used for storing expensive perfumes, ointments, and oils. Originating prominently in Egypt and the Near East (dating back to 2000-1800 BC), they were essential for beauty, medical, and religious rituals, and featured sealed, narrow necks to preserve their costly contents. The sealed flask would be required to be broken off when the contents were used.



☞ v. 38 "... she stood behind [Jesus] at his feet weeping ... wet his feet with her tears ... wiped his feet with her hair ...

kissed his feet ... poured perfume on his feet." This woman invades a place she is not allowed to enter. The reputation of Jesus as a great teacher and healer had spread throughout the area of Galilee (see Luke 6:17-19). Certainly, this sinful woman knew of Jesus and sought him out. It is a bold move for her to enter into the home of a Pharisee. She was courageous knowing the risk of being kicked out Simon's house and being subjected to further humiliation. She recognized something in Jesus she wanted. Forgiveness. How did she get in unnoticed?

This woman carries the weight of her sins even though we do not know exactly what they were. Whatever her sins, they were weighing heavily on her mind and spirit. Are the woman's tears of deep grief or relief? The perfume can be an indication of her prostitution or it could simply be a sign of her wealth.

~ THE CONTRAST ~

☞ v. 39 "... If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him that she is a sinner." Simon mumbles and grumbles about the impropriety of the situation (I think Simon, though talking to himself, said this just loud enough for Jesus to hear). Simon draws out the contrast between "this sinful woman" who lives outside the mandates of God's law and the propriety of a religious man (himself, implied and Jesus, explicitly) who lives his life according to God's laws. The righteous would avoid the "sinful" and not associate with "those people" ... certainly not touch them and become "unclean."

~ THE PARABLE OF THE EXTRAVAGANCE AND FIERCE LOVE OF GOD ~

☞ vv. 40-43 "*Simon, I have something to tell you.*" Two people are in debt to a man ... just like all of us are in the debt of sinfulness before God (including Simon!). One man owes a small debt. The other man owes a much larger debt. Neither can pay their debt. Surprisingly, the moneylender cancels both debts. Which of the two men will love this moneylender more? Simon - reluctantly (because he already knows where this story is going!) - says the man with the greater cancelled debt. Jesus affirms the correct answer. Does Simon see himself as the man with the small debt and the woman as the man with the large debt? Simon erroneously believes that he owes God much less than this disreputable woman because he has lived a life of holiness and righteousness.

~ LOVE - SINS - FORGIVENESS ~

☞ vv. 44-47 “... *her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much.*” This sinful woman offered Jesus the hospitality that Simon had neglected. She washes. She anoints. She kisses. Simon did not let Jesus wash his feet as was customary when entering a home. Simon did not anoint Jesus with oil to freshen him up when he approached the table. Simon did not give Jesus a kiss of greeting as was customary upon greeting a guest in your home. This woman displays love beyond the scope of a righteous man! Therefore, God’s extravagant love cancels her sin (as it does for Simon!) and she receives a pronouncement of forgiveness from Jesus, “*You sins are forgiven.*”

The word for “*forgiven*” (*aphesis*) is the same root word for “*release*” used in Lk 4:18-20 when Jesus announces his mission to “*proclaim release to the captives.*” Do not know the exact nature of the woman’s “sins” that she is carrying but Jesus releases her from the burden of that sin(s) and sends her forth in peace.

Jesus tells Simon that this woman has “*loved much*” - The word in the text is *agapaó* which means “to love wholeheartedly and unconditionally” ... with self-giving action (which reflects the character of God; see Mtt. 22:39 - “*Love [agapaó] your neighbor as yourself*”). The woman’s expression of love opened the way for her to experience forgiveness. Faith receives forgiveness (see v. 50; also Eph. 2:8).

☞ v. 49 “*Who is this ...?*” Already in Luke, Jesus has “gotten into trouble” with the Pharisees and teachers of the law for his views/teaching on fasting and prayer (see Lk 5:33), his observation of the Sabbath (see Lk 6:9-11) and his acceptance of John the Baptist’s baptism for repentance of sins which the pharisees rejected (see Lk 7:29-30). Up to this point in Luke, people are responding to Jesus’ teachings, healings and exorcisms with great excitement and acclaim (see Lk 6:7-19; 7:16). But now we are talking about something only God can do ... forgive sins.

~ FAITH - PEACE ~

☞ v. 50 “*Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.*” This is NOT the first instance of faith in Luke’s gospel!

* The Man with Leprosy (Lk 5:12-16) “*Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.*” Immediately the leprosy left the man.

* The Paralytic Lowered through the Roof (Lk 5:17-26) “*When Jesus saw their faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’*” Immediately [the paralytic] stood up in front of everyone, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

* The Centurion’s Servant (Lk 7:1-10) “*Lord ... say the word, and my servant will be healed.*” “*I tell you, said Jesus, ‘I have not found such great faith even in Israel.’*” [They] returned to the house and found the servant well.

* The Pronouncement of Peace - The word for “peace” (*eiréné*) probably comes from the root word “to join” (*eiro*) which means “wholeness” that comes from tranquility, harmony and rest. This is peace that comes when all the essential parts are joined together. This peace is a gift from God (see Romans 5:1 “... *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...*”; also see John 14:27 “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.*”)

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ MATTHEW 25:35-40 ~ “THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT”:

Love God with all your heart, soul and mind AND love your neighbor as yourself.

☞ v.35-40 Loving Neighbor

“I was hungry ...”	↔	“... you gave me something to eat.”
“I was thirsty ...”	↔	“... you gave me something to drink.”
“I was a stranger ...”	↔	“... you invited me in.”

“I needed clothes ...” ↔ “... you clothed me.”
“I was sick ...” ↔ “... you looked after me.”
“I was in prison ...” ↔ “... you came to visit me.”
“... whatever you did for one of the least of these [people] of mine, you did for me.”

This is the final teaching/instruction of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel account before moving into the passion narratives (The plot against Jesus; the Last Supper; Gethsemane; Jesus’ arrest; the crucifixion, etc.). loving God goes hand in hand with loving our neighbor. When we care for the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned - each of whom are created in the image of God - we are showing love for God, too. Love for God cannot be separated from our love for neighbor.

~ **OBSERVATIONS** ~

1. This is a story of contrast - and yet it is this woman who - showing great love - is granted forgiveness and peace. The woman is the focus of the story.
* man ↔ woman * named “Simon” ↔ unnamed woman * status “Pharisee” ↔ “sinful” woman
2. The fierce love of God (tenacious, determined) breaks through the “many sins” of this woman (Rev. Dr. Brian Blount).
3. Forgiveness releases us to love.
4. Love for God mandates love for neighbor.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION ...

1. How can I/our group more intentionally welcome people who are often rejected by society or the church?
2. Do you believe God wants to forgive your debt? How can you become more in touch with the magnitude of God’s forgiveness for you?
3. Does love produce forgiveness, or does forgiveness produce love? How do they work together?
4. What does it mean to “love much” or “love little”?
5. Why do you think the Pharisee didn’t do anything (hospitality) that was customary for Jesus?
6. Do you always see people as Jesus sees them or is that something that you struggle with?
7. How would you describe Jesus’ interaction with Simon? Lovingly? With tolerance and grace? Reprimanding? Impatience?

NOTES ...