

If God Lived Next Door

<p>If God lived next door, I'd drop off a loaf of bread. I'd use my mom's best recipe. I'd wrap it in parchment and ribbon and place it on the front stoop. If God lived next door, I'd leave a note with my phone number. <i>Call anytime you need anything!</i> <i>I'm always happy to help!</i> If God lived next door, I'd keep sugar on the shelf, just in case she needed a cup. I'd put a picnic table in the front yard and begin taking my coffee there. Whenever God passed by with their gaggle of rescue dogs, I could say, <i>Want to sit for a moment? Want to rest your legs?</i> I'd keep a jar of dog treats and water by the mailbox and change my doormat to one that says: <i>All are welcome here.</i></p>	<p>I'd invite God over for dinner. She'd bring bread and juice. I'd host a block party, so that everyone could meet her. I'd start a community garden so that the kids could run between rows of squash and tomatoes while we adults put our hands in the dirt. We'd share stories while we weeded, and eat harvest meals at the end of the season. If God lived next door, I'd want to build something beautiful. Then again, who says she doesn't?</p> <p><i>Poem by Rev. Sarah Speed</i></p>
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I Come With My Devotion

ANGEL'S STORY ("O Jesus I Have Promised")



Scan to hear
the tune!

Words: Anna Strickland (2025)

Music: Arthur H. Mann (1881)



I come with my de - vo - tion to love and serve
 I hear my Sa - vior's call - ing to serve the lost
 God made us in God's im - age each per - son whom



my God Whose lov - ing cos - mos formed me
 and least The hun - gry and im - pris - oned,
 we meet Ex - tra - va - gant - ly lov - ing



be - fore I e - ver sought The glo - ry of the
 the bro - ken ones like me For in each act of
 all of hu - man - i - ty So I'll re - turn the



hea - vens or praise on earth be - low So ev - ery
 kind - ness it's Christ for whom we care All wor - thy
 love which has formed me from the start — Lov - ing



gift I have now I lay be - fore the throne
 of our love — since it's God's face we bear
 my cre - a - tor, my - self, and ev - ery heart

Read Luke 7:36-50; Matthew 25:35-40
Commentary | Rev. Dr. Brian Blount

Fierce Love

How fiercely does God love? Let me tell you a Galilean story.

Simon, a Pharisee, a religious man who lives his life according to God's laws, invites Jesus into his home. Customarily, such a host would greet a guest with acts of hospitality: the washing of feet soiled by dusty roadways; an anointing of oil for respite from the heat of the day; a kiss of welcome. Though Simon receives Jesus, he provides no such greeting.

Impertinent and audacious, having heard that the great teacher is in Simon's house, a woman, an unsolicited sex worker, invades the space. Immediately, the Pharisee, a man tasked with conveying God's love to God's people, distances himself from her. From his perspective, the love in which she trafficks, commercially but not virtuously intimate, prohibits her presence. But Jesus graciously allows her to draw near. When she is close, ironically, she offers Jesus the hospitality that Simon had neglected. She washes. She anoints. She kisses.

Scandalized, Simon rebukes Jesus for letting this woman touch him. Disappointed in Simon, Jesus responds with a parable about the extravagance and ferocity of God's love: two people are in debt to a man, just as every one of us is in the debt of sinfulness before God. One debtor owes the man little. The other debtor owes the man much. Ridiculously, the man forgives both of them their debts. Which debtor, Jesus asks, will be the most grateful, will respond to the man with the most love? Of course, it is the man who owed the most.

Simon believes that he owes God much less than this disreputable woman because he has lived a life of holiness and righteousness. Just so, Simon can never know the ferocity of the woman's love for the God who loves her. According to Jesus, God loves her with an extravagance of grace that cancels all her sins just as surely as the creditor expunged his lender's massive debt.

Jesus tells the woman to go in peace. How can she, though, without help? Living on the streets, she finds welcome among those who struggle like her. Forgiven, she now needs the welcome she has shown Jesus to be extended to her by a community of Jesus people—people who recognize that they, too, have been graced by the extravagance of God's fierce, unrelenting love.

Did not Jesus say in Matthew 25 that to welcome him is to welcome those whom the self-righteous have rejected? The hungry. The immigrant. The homeless. The convict. Jesus' church can show Jesus' fierce love by inviting into the intimacy of their faith fellowship those whom others are scandalized by.

By recalling Jesus' journey to the cross, the season of Lent reminds us of God's extravagant love. May this season inspire us to love others just as extravagantly, just as fiercely as God, through Jesus, loves us.

Reflect

Describe an example of extravagant love.



LL Cool J | Nicolette Faison
12"x24" Acrylic, marker, paper collage on canvas

Second Sunday in Lent

the good news is... great love for God & neighbor

Read Luke 7:36-50

Artist Statement | Rev. Nicolette Faison

Ladies love Cool Jesus. For real. Women absolutely loved Jesus, and the woman with the alabaster jar is a great example of that. Who else shows up to an event unannounced with expensive oils to not only anoint someone's feet but to then offer their tears and use their hair to wipe the feet clean? I don't think people comprehend the drama within that part of the story. This was an act of love, admiration, and prophecy. To me, this interpretation of the story gives the woman the attention she deserves.

When I thought about the theme, *Tell Me Something Good*, I realized I had spent much of my year guest preaching at classic church buildings with stained glass windows which told the parishioners the good news of Jesus. It felt most appropriate to bring the concept of stained glass into my art. Instead of the maximalist collage approach that I often use, I chose to let the paint tell the story. The color choice is both bright and vibrant yet softer than other pieces. I selected the yellow purposely to contrast the purple hair. In an attempt to clearly separate the blue sky glass from the rest of the piece, I layered patterns with a red/pink color scale to make the art pop, emphasizing the distinct glass shapes one could find on a church window.

Several aspects of the piece are deconstructed, such as the woman's head and the foot of Jesus, both detached from bodies. I intentionally emphasize these elements to not distract us from the core of the story. The woman was intimately entwined with the feet of Jesus, her hair entangled with his leg. She released tears that would nourish his toes as the rich oil replenished his skin. To be cared for, to be seen, to be loved, that is something good.

Look

In the artwork, notice how deconstructed details are entwined together. What parts of the image draw your attention the most?



See You | T. Denise Anderson
14"x18" Acrylic on canvas

Second Sunday in Lent

the good news is... great love for God & neighbor

Read Matthew 25:35-40

Artist Statement | Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus uses diminutive language to refer to people of importance⁷ and describes small, humble things (like sheep, lilies, and sparrows) as precious. He uses a mustard seed in a parable about faith,⁸ and tells his disciples to be like children.⁹ For Matthew's Jesus, little is a big deal!

For that reason, we should pay attention to Jesus' use of the word "least" in this text. In a book where Jesus talks about little things being loved, the word "least" here takes on new meaning: most loved. Indeed, God loves everyone, but there are certainly those for whom God has a special affinity. As the Confession of Belhar states, "God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged."¹⁰

As I meditated on this scripture, the image of a doorway kept emerging, perhaps because the text wrestles with the notion of who is in and who is out. This piece shows an excerpt of the text and the word "least" is, ironically, the largest. Next to it is a door that is partially open, and there is some ambiguity intended in that. Is the door being opened or closed? For whom is the door opening or closing? From the viewer's perspective, on what "side" of the door do they find themselves? Are they being invited in or kept out? Are they doing the inviting or the excluding? In the same way Jesus asks the nations to consider where they will be in his eschatological vision, I invite the viewer to consider where they are relative to where God is. Where does the Savior see you? Where does your neighbor see you?

Look

Contemplate the paint drips in the artwork. What meaning or feelings do the words convey to you?

⁷ For example: Matthew 11:11, 11:25

⁸ Matthew 13:31-32

⁹ Matthew 18:1-14

¹⁰ The Belhar Confession is a statement of faith originally professed by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986 during the struggle against apartheid. It has since been adopted by several churches and denominations globally. Read the confession here: p.cusa.org/resource/belhar-confession