

## **Respectable Inclusion**

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Luke 7: 36-50

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[Matthew Vines](#) is a progressive evangelical who is gay and has written *God and the Gay Christian, The Biblical Case in Support of Same Sex Relationships*. He has supported the full inclusion of LGBTQ folk in the church, especially toward affirming same sex marriage and challenging evangelical conservative churches to be affirming. On June 30 he wrote an opinion piece for the New York Times “I’m Gay, Not Queer. It Matters” that set off a firestorm in the community. In the article he criticizes the use of the banner term Queer, which has been embraced by large parts of the LGBTQ community as an inclusive term. He claims that it undermines the fundamental political argument that sexual orientation is an inborn trait rather than a lifestyle choice. He contends that using the term queer, is less acceptable to the church and will hinder the acceptance of gays (and lesbians) by more conservative churches and political parties. He has been accused, especially by other progressive evangelicals, including [Brandan Robertson](#), a prominent queer, pastor and theologian, of engaging in respectability politics and assimilation of the LGBT community into mainstream society rather than honouring the diversity that it is. According to Robertson, this kind of message from Vines puts at risk those who are not privileged in the community, such as those who are transgender, non-binary, black, indigenous and people of colour. Vines seems to be more focused on being respectable for the conservative church than celebrating the Queer community for all it includes. Jesus was faced with this challenge of respectability in our reading today.

Jesus was invited to dinner by a Pharisee, Simon. The customs often were to have a slave wash the feet of the guests and maybe even offer perfumed ointment for your hair; Simon did none of this. A woman found out Jesus was there and came into the house. She is described as a woman of the city, a sinner, which often means prostitute. If this was the case it is likely that she was a woman who had been abused and vulnerable, which

continues to be the case today – 90% of those engaged in prostitution are survivors of sexual abuse. She had met Jesus previously where he offered her forgiveness and then tracked him down to this dinner party, filled with gratitude. She washes his feet with her tears, drying them with her hair, and anointing them with ointment.

The Pharisee and other guests were disgusted not only at her behaviour but at Jesus allowing it. What she was doing was inappropriate and not respectable from their perspective. However, Jesus tells a parable about a two people owing money, one an amount equivalent to a days worth of wages, another worth two years wages and the moneylender forgives both their debts. Jesus asks who would love the moneylender more? The answer is the one whose forgiven debt was higher would show more love and appreciation. In like manner, the woman had much more to be forgiven for and showed much more love. Jesus asks Simon to see this woman, which means notice her, really see her and notice that while Simon did not offer any water for Jesus' feet, offered him no kiss, and did not anoint his head, she has bathed Jesus feet with her tears, kissed him repeatedly and anointed his feet. Jesus puts Simon in his place, pointing out that the woman has offered more hospitality and love than him. The woman's actions, which were not seen as not being respectable, Jesus turns upside down and makes her actions respectable. He affirms her, reminding her that her sins are forgiven and then says her faith has saved her and tells her to go in peace.

She had shown real hospitality, even as one who would not have been accepted or welcomed in the community. Hospitality is a recurring theme in the bible, not only with Jesus, who lived off the hospitality of others, and encouraged radical welcome but also in the Old Testament among the prophets. It was the prophets who often called the people to care for the widow, the orphan, the foreigner and stranger. For us today, this is often viewed as how we treat those who are most vulnerable, including immigrants and refugees. We might often criticize the US for it's immigration policies but we should take note of our own record here in

Canada which seems to be getting worse as well. According to an article by the [Breach](#), in 2025 the Liberal government boasted deporting 23,260 people, the highest number in one year in Canada's history. Multiple immigration advocates and lawyers told The Breach they're witnessing aggressive tactics that include CBSA detaining migrants without any prior contact, and plainclothes officers confronting migrants at their homes, workplaces, places of worship, and elementary schools. It sounds like a report from our neighbours to the South, but this is in Canada. Refugee claimants are also being deported before the 12 month waiting period is up. We need to be doing much better at welcoming the stranger and foreigner. Where is our hospitality?

Another important element of this story is the way Jesus receives this woman's actions. What the woman did was a very intimate act. Her hair was down which women only did if they were going to bed or bedding a man. The whole offering by the woman to Jesus was very intimate and sexual. The Pharisee and guests were scandalized, much like many in the church today would be, especially evangelical conservatives who too often focus on sex as sin, and the body as something to be ashamed of. The message from Jesus, however, in his acceptance and non-reaction (to the dismay of Simon and his guests) is that he is very body positive – one might even say sex positive. It is not a side of Jesus we see much but it is very evident here. There is no shame or embarrassment, only acceptance and appreciation for the love the woman was showing.

Finally in this passage, Luke lifts up the women who are leaders in Jesus' movement. It is a radical statement of inclusion. This is the only place in the gospel that names or lists women in the same context of naming the disciples. The scripture names that they not only ministered to and with Jesus and the community of disciples but they also financially supported the ministry and mission of Jesus out of their own resources. In order to do so they would have also had to leave home which would have been frowned upon. Yet Jesus welcomed them. Luke here, lifts up the importance of women leaders, disciples in Jesus' community. We have all

experienced women in our lives who have been leaders. What women leaders in the church have inspired or mentored you?

As a Diaconal Minister my training for ministry was surrounded by women as men are a minority in this type of ministry. It is rooted in the deaconess movement and so almost all my classmates, teachers, and facilitators were women. It was a Diaconal Minister before I even knew about Diaconal Ministry who was a mentor and inspiration to me, my faith, and my ministry. Betty Marlin was a staff person with the Conference, the provincial body of the church in Alberta. She often worked with the youth at Conference, where I was a leader and taught us about social justice and mission of the United Church. She was a role model of advocacy and standing up for the vulnerable. During the 80's when I first knew her, she was known to always wear a pink triangle in support of gays and lesbians in the church, long before the national church accepted and welcomed lesbians and gays as ministers. Over the years, as I became a minister, we had many opportunities to work together and it was always a pleasure and privilege for I have learned much from her.

Jesus was clear in his ministry and messages that inclusion, hospitality, and supporting those who are vulnerable is more important than what might be considered respectable by the mainstream or majority. What is respectable, too often can exclude those who are in need and most vulnerable. Matthew Vines has fallen into this trap. By encouraging the LGBTQ community to avoid using the word Queer and the politics associated with it, he is conforming with the norms of conservative church and society, and asking those who don't fit the mainstream to wait for justice and inclusion. This kind of thinking not only denies justice for all, but also puts people, like transgender and non-binary young people at risk who experience a 72% increase in suicide attempts in jurisdictions where anti-transgender laws are enacted. Jesus calls us to a radical love that welcomes and accepts the diversity of all, and upholds the dignity of everyone.

May we be committed to loving all even if it is not seen as respectable.  
May we celebrate and honour the inclusion of women in leadership, as  
Jesus did May we live out God's call through Jesus to a radical love that  
welcomes the diversity of all God's creation.