

Sunday, 13 March 2016

Mary's out-pouring John12



John 12:1-8

Have you ever been so grateful to someone that you didn't know how to show it? Maybe it was a parent that gave you a large amount of money that helped you buy your first house. Maybe it was a doctor that diagnosed a problem and gave you a medicine that saved your life, or the life of your child. Whoever it was you felt like no matter what you did, it wouldn't be enough to show your gratitude.

Mary experienced something amazing that caused her to be filled with gratitude. Our gospel reading isn't the first time Mary has fallen down at Jesus' feet. In the previous chapter Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. There we met a grief-stricken Mary. In John 11:32 we read *"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here,*

my brother would not have died.” Having lost her brother, Mary wept at the feet of Jesus, ... and Jesus wept with her. Many here know the deep gut wrenching sadness she must have experienced when her brother died. ... She cared for her brother, Lazarus, as his illness progressed. At some point they realized that Lazarus was not going to recover. They felt helpless- their cures, their efforts, weren't enough. They called for Jesus hoping he could work a miracle and save him, but he didn't come. Lazarus died and they entered into mourning. Mary had been grieving for 4 days before Jesus arrived, and she fell at his feet.

When we meet Mary in the next chapter she is in an unbelievable situation. She is at a banquet. She is once again eating with her previously dead and buried brother, who is now alive. Jesus, who brought him back to life, is also at the table. ... What would you do? How could you say, "thank you"? How could you possibly thank someone like Jesus in that kind of a situation?

Mary got a glimpse of who Jesus is. She saw that he is not just a carpenter. He is not just the man she has known as a family friend. He is more. Mary saw Jesus clearly when he gave her brother back to her. In that moment she caught a glimpse of the healing and restoration of the Kingdom of God.

How do you respond when something that profound happens? What can you possibly say? What can you do to show your gratitude? ... In the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, by Isaac Watts there is a line I love, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small...". The whole universe given to God is too small an offering of gratitude for what God has done for us. ... It's also a funny image- what do you offer God that is not already His? In our offertory we often pray a verse from 1st Chronicles chapter 29- "all things come from you, and of your own have we given you". We cannot give God anything that is not already His.

So Mary asks herself how she can show Jesus her gratitude. How can she respond to a man that has brought her brother back to life? How can she respond to a man that has shown her God's kingdom?

Mary had wet Jesus' feet with her tears when her brother, Lazarus, was dead. Now she soaks his feet with expensive perfume- and she wipes them with her hair. Remember that this is a Middle Eastern context and women usually kept their hair covered out of modesty. A woman would usually only show their hair to their husband or family, definitely not to single men. It is incredibly intimate and incredibly inappropriate in this culture. It is scandalous. To Mary she is holding nothing back to show her gratitude. She has thrown all the customs out the window. All that matters to her is the intensity of her gratitude.

Mary poured perfume on Jesus feet worth a year's wage- so in modern money this is \$40,000 to \$50,000 worth of perfume.... I wonder if she used this perfume to anoint Lazarus' dead body. Maybe it was her savings? Perhaps it was her dowry? Maybe it doesn't even matter how much it's worth. It was the best. And maybe that's the point. Oscar Wilde once said a "cynic is someone who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing". We think so much in terms of money. That is Judas' place in our story.

In a way, Judas is our voice here. Judas heaps our judgement on Mary. Judas speaks out of our discomfort and cynicism. What a waste. How inappropriate. ... "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (12:5) ... Mary really gets who Jesus is in this moment. He is no ordinary Rabbi. It is sad that Judas doesn't see it. Better to balance the books than spend time in prayer. Better to do something practical rather than show up at church on Sunday. ... Care for the poor is very important. Of course we are to do this. Jesus even says that we will find him by caring for the poor. But, we should also beware of making the poor into an idol. Seek first the kingdom of God (Matt

6:33). Worship is reserved for God alone (Ex 20:3). This is what Mary was doing. ... It is out of deep worship of God that we find Christ in the poor and find the strength to serve them. If we turn the poor into an idol, we will *use* the poor to give us what only God can.

Mary gives everything to Jesus because she sees him clearly. The perfume poured out is only a symbol of Mary pouring herself out in love to Jesus. I'm sure Mary even felt that wasn't enough- even that wasn't enough to show the love and devotion that Jesus deserved.

It makes me think about how often I ask what the bare minimum is. How much do I have to do to be considered a "good Christian"? What is the minimum standard I can meet and still be let in? What is the minimum I should give? What is the minimum amount of prayer per day? What is the minimum amount of Bible study I should do? ... That is absolutely not what Mary is thinking. She is extravagantly giving everything. She is holding nothing back. She is pouring herself out at the feet of Jesus.

In the next chapter (Jn 13) Jesus will teach his disciples how to love and serve each other by washing each other's feet. Mary has foreshadowed that teaching by washing the feet of Jesus- not with water, but with perfume- and she doesn't wipe them with a towel, but with her hair. The love she shows is a costly love, but it is a love that barely considers the cost and even wishes it had more to give.

I didn't finish the verse I quoted from the Hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. It goes, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small; Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all." Mary poured herself out to Jesus. This act was Mary's *Kenosis*. *Kenosis* is a Greek word for emptying. Mary poured herself out. She emptied herself. She gave everything to Jesus in loving worship. She held nothing back.

Mary offered everything to Jesus, who was God's *kenosis*. The Son of God emptied himself as Mary poured out her perfume. Paul writes in Philippians 2:7-8, “[The Son] made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!”

This is God's *Kenosis*- His self-emptying. Mary poured her perfume on the one who left his heavenly riches to be poor among us. Jesus sees her action as pointing to his coming death- the ultimate act of God's self-emptying. He sees her as anointing him for his burial.

It wasn't long before that the body of Lazarus was the smell in the air. Now the fragrance of the perfume Mary poured out on Jesus' feet filled the whole house. The fragrance of the out-poured life of the Son of God has filled the whole world. And just as Mary smelled of the perfume because of her act of worship, so we have the fragrance of God's outpouring. Paul says in 2 Cor ch 2:15 "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved..." So may we smell of the love we have poured out to Jesus.... Which we offer in response to his loved poured out on us.