

Unrestricted Love

Luke 12:1-8

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

I am sure most of you have heard about Mary, Martha and Lazarus before. The other story that we usually remember concerning these three made them famous. That story happens just a chapter before in chapter 11 of John, telling us that Lazarus had died and that Martha and Mary cry and weep at their brother's death. And then Jesus comes and you know -right? He raises him from the grave after four days of being buried and sealed in a tomb. But chapter 11 also tells us that this event was pivotal in the ministry of Jesus, because after he raised Lazarus, he has to leave or risk his life. It is at this very point that the High Priest Caiaphas calls together the Sanhedrin and tells them it is better if one man dies for the nation, then the people be destroyed for this one man. It's at this point that they believe to many are listening to Jesus, to many are believing in him. Its at this point they believe that Jesus is becoming to powerful and so they seek him out to destroy him.

Jesus meanwhile, the one who had just brought back the dead, leaves town and heads out almost to the wilderness and stays there with his disciples. No longer can he go from town to town, preaching or healing. His public ministry is now over, because the religious leaders are seeking to destroy him.

Now we come to our reading today, Six days before the Passover, Jesus knows his hour has come. He leaves the safety of the wilderness and heads back towards Jerusalem and his final Passover in Jerusalem. Along the way he stops at Bethany a town just two miles outside the capital and High holy site of Jerusalem.

Can you imagine the joy and excitement that day in the Lazarus household. Mary and Martha had experienced a miracle right before them when their brother who was dead came back out of the grave alive. But Jesus had left after that. Now the one who did this great gift is back and they are going to have a feast, a dinner to celebrate. Now the party is about to begin and everyone is getting ready to celebrate.

So Jesus and his disciples are there with Lazarus and other guests all reclining around the table talking and waiting for the feasting to begin. Martha as usual is the one in the kitchen making sure all the work is getting done, she is preparing the food and getting the feast ready. But the other sister, Mary, we are told comes into the room where the men and feasting carrying a bottle of the most exquisite and costliest perfume. The text tells us it is pure nard, an

aromatic oil made from a plant in India, and unmixed pounds worth is around 300 denarii, a years wages of a common laborer.

Is it strange that Mary would possess something like this? Probably. We don't know what Lazarus did for a living, having to support his sisters and probably others, but whatever it was this is one expensive ointment to have sitting around the house. Maybe it was leftover from Lazarus funeral and he didn't need it anymore since he was alive again. Or maybe she just took everthing she had, everything she could sell, everything she could think of just to buy this perfume to give to Jesus. However she got it she then assumes the position of a servant, kneeling at Jesus' feet to wash them, after all they would have been dirty after traveling in from the wilderness to Bethany. But we don't hear about anybody washing anyone else's feet. Mary goes out of her way to wash not just with water, but with expensive ointment the feet of Christ.

Then horror of horrors she lets down her hair to wipe them dry. This is not done by proper women. Only street women would have their hair down and uncovered especially in the presence of men. But Mary, a woman of this house, does this servants job and does the most unthinkable thing she wipes the feet dry with her hair risking bringing shame and ridicule upon herself. We are told the whole house was filled with the beautiful aroma even over the smell of the feast that is being served by Martha.

What was Mary thinking? What made her do something so humbling?

What made her want to use an entire life's savings just to wipe someone's feet?

What made her use costly perfume when water could have done just as well?

Simply put – what Mary did was an act of devotion. It was a gift from her heart. She wanted to give the best she had, and the best she could do was to offer Jesus this anointing. Jesus was someone very special, she loved him dearly, and she wanted to show it, so she gave him the best. That's what happens when people love with their entire being, not holding anything back.

This reminds us also of how God loves us. His love is far greater, far more perfect than ours ever can or will be. He gives everything fos us. Last week we heard about God's extravagant and never-ending love when we talked about the man who had two sons. Even though the man was terribly disappointed in his two sons – one had cashed in his share of the inheritance and spent it all on wasteful living and the other son couldn't see why his Father was do generous and lavish on this younger son once he came home, even with all that the Father loved them both, giving them everything he had. That is the story Jesus was teaching to show us how God is devoted to us, how extravagant his love is! We waste what God has given us,

time, talents and money. We are jealousy of others and resentful. And yet the Lord loves us anyway. He loves us even though we rightfully deserve nothing from God at all.

Today we hear of how Mary realizes how much love Jesus has shown to her and to Lazarus and her sister Martha. She wants to return that love, show her devotion and so she gives boldly, humbly, sacrificially of the best that she had to return to him just a small part of what he has given her already.

Not everybody understands this kind of love. Not everybody can understand what it means to be devoted, to offer sacrificially, to give heart and soul to someone else. Judas speaks like many people in our society would speak, this is wasteful, This is irresponsible, reckless, foolish, rash. It is unseemly, disrespectful, and to embarrassing. Judas even brings in the thought that expenses are needed paid, and this nard could have been used for a better financial endeavor – perhaps helping the poor (or his own pockets). How many of us would have been like Judas, not understanding the pouring out of all that money? How many of us haven't examined our own finances when we get our investment checks, paychecks, social security checks and wondered first about the bills, perhaps holding some over for entertainment, or some for travels and other needs only to then decide what to give back to God. Do we look to give God the first above all else, sacrificially, humbly and graciously giving thanks for all he has given to us. Do we put God first above all else, not worried about how it might look, what others may say, how inconvenient it might be, sacrificially giving of our time and our talents to do the work of God, or do we hold back. Mary could have sold the perfume for a lot of money and could have used only some of it to buy a less expensive perfume that would have been just fine. By worldly standards that would have made more sense. By worldly standards and expectations Mary was foolish and irresponsible. But she showed true love.

Ask yourself today when was the last time you showed true love to God. To kneel humbly at his feet at the altar as a servant of the kingdom. Ask yourself how extravagant has your devotion been to our God and Savior who gave his life for you? How active, dedicated, committed have you been in return? Extravagant love like Mary's is the kind of Love we are called to do. May we be filled with that passion and that devotion, showing God our love in all that we do, physically, mentally and spiritually. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father We turn to the cross, and see the sinfulness of our lives, the pains and the rebellions that we have caused your heart as we over and over again have turned away from your will and your love. We look to that cross and see the love that you had for us, so much so that you were willing to send your own son to hang on that cross as our Sacrifice for all of us who deserve death but are given instead new life, washed clean of the sins and made new and righteous before you. We give you thanks for this great gift of love.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

God almighty, with the cross always before us, may we see the glory of your grace. May all of humanity turn towards you and give thanks that you have forgiven us, and saved us. Continue to inspire us with the symbols of the faith, to draw us closer to you and to always see that grace as the foundation of our faith so that we may grow in you into eternity. Inspire your Church to look towards your cross and be witnesses of your redeeming love. Use us as you will Lord, we are your servants, we are your church, we are yours unable to do anything without you on our side. Guide us as your faithful community this day.

Lord in your Mercy, hear our prayer.

God, Grant wisdom and strength to the nations of this world. Empower this world to feel the peace of your glory that flows out from your throne. May it sweep down to cover this world and wash away all pain and anguish, all suffering and disasters. May it end war and hatred. May it give peace and security to those who feel helpless and alone. May you continue to be with those facing hunger and diseases that kill so many people around the world this very hour. Empower your people to hear the cry of our fellow man, to reach out in Christian love and to give aid and support to those in need around the world and here at home in our own families and neighbors.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer.

Almighty Lord, we turn to you in suffering and hurt. You are the great healer and comforter of all those in need. You give healing and hope, you give life and joy. Take away the pains and sufferings from all those dealing with hardships this day. Be with our shut-ins, the hospitalized and the lost and forgotten, be with us Lord and with all those we lift up in our prayers to you now Howell Crawford, Norma Kreidler.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer

Into your hands, O lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.