

04/03/22 WORSHIP SERVICE – LENT 5

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE – PASTOR CALEB YODER

Leader: Holy One, we seek you while you may be found.

People: We call upon you while you are near.

Leader: Have mercy on us, O God, for our thoughts are not your thoughts and our ways are not your ways.

People: Forgive us for believing the myth of scarcity. Help us live into your abundance.

Leader: As we walk with Christ on this Lenten journey, let us see your way more clearly

All: and follow your way more faithfully.

(silence)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Blessed are we whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Blessed are we whose sins our God does not count against us.

God, you make a path in the wilderness, a river in the desert. May we trust that your gifts are enough, enough and overflowing to the point that they may pass through us like a river in the desert, like fragrant perfume over our Savior's feet.

We trust in your unfailing love that is without money and without cost. Let us rejoice and be glad!

MORNING PRAYER

Louise Schmidt is receiving hospice care and the family appreciates our prayers for her last days. She has had good days with quality time with her family.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Creator of galaxies, we marvel at the mystery that you can be present in our everyday life and breath.

We marvel at your world in its beauty and terror and at our fragile place within it.

We thank you for the redemption found in Christ Jesus, in whom we know of your marvelous love and through whom we hope for salvation as the power of new life amid every kind of death.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Hear our longings for your coming reign of peace, as we remain disheartened at news of war, division, and changing climate.

Make us instruments of your peace, in spite of our complicity with the powers of sin, violence, and systemic injustice.

Give us today our daily bread.

Hear our prayers for the needs of our community.

We pray for the family of Marlin and Sheri Janzen and Karis, Joel, and Jackson Hill as they anticipate the birth of baby Ezekiel in Kansas City tomorrow. Be especially near to Karis, and we trust in your healing power to work through the medical care given to baby Ezekiel.

We thank you for the precious gift of new life.

We offer our continued prayers for Di and Lee Suderman as Di receives home health and occupational therapy.

We offer prayers and solidarity with all who are recovering from procedures or are living with health vulnerabilities.

We also offer prayers for all who are grieving losses of loved ones or friends, regardless of how much time has passed. We know that grief does not go away, but only changes and is woven into the fabric of our lives.

We pray for your grace and mercy to accompany every grief.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Hear our prayers for reconciliation with you and with others. We pray for relationships impacted by hurt and broken trust. We pray for a spirit of unity in our differences in our congregation and community.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

Hear our prayers for the world and for our personal struggles with temptation.

We pray for those in Ukraine, in Russia, and in other parts of the world where war and violence are dealing deadly blows to those who live there.

We pray for those who are fleeing and facing traumas and struggles for daily needs. We pray for those near fighting and witnessing the horrors of war.

We pray for the courage to speak truth to power, among Christians in both Russia and Ukraine.

O God, we are humbled to learn of tragedy that exceeds our own daily challenges, and yet we know that you care for us in our challenges both lesser and greater.

Trustworthy God, your Spirit enables us to pray.

Accept our requests and work through everything that will bring about your loving purpose for humanity.

Let us rejoice in your extravagant love and abundant gifts.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

SERMON – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

John 12:1-8

“Discipleship Defined”

Worship Leader

For the first four Sundays in Lent our texts were from Luke. This morning we read from the Gospel of John. A few introductory points of interest – John was written significantly later than the other three gospels and there are stories and details in John’s gospel that are not found elsewhere.

The stories of Jesus being anointed are told in each of the gospels. In Matthew and Mark the setting is in Bethany, just a couple of miles from Jerusalem, at the home of Simon the leper where an unnamed woman anoints Jesus’ *head*. This is symbolic of an act of preparation for Jesus’ impending death and burial. In Luke the setting for this story is at the home of one of the Pharisees and the woman is identified only as “a woman in the city who was a sinner”. She anoints Jesus’ *feet* as she weeps and dries his feet with her hair. This story has nothing to do with Jesus’ burial, but is about the woman’s love and respect for Jesus and him forgiving her sins.

In today’s reading from John details from the stories are brought together and some different ones are added. The setting is, again, in Bethany, a few days before the Passover. In this story the dinner is being hosted by his dear friends – the siblings Mary, Martha and Lazarus. I’m reading from the New International Version, John 12:1-8:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint^[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.^[b]" ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you,^[c] but you will not always have me."

We'll hear more about this story now from the perspective of Martha.

Hello. I'm Martha. Sister of the renowned Lazarus and Mary. That's right... there are three of us and both of my siblings are much more popular and beloved than I. I'm sure you remember me though! I'm the one that Jesus "gently chided". That story is told in Luke's gospel – for whatever reason, the other gospel writers didn't include it. I'm grateful that they didn't; it's kind of an embarrassing story. I'll just quickly tell you about it so that it's out on the table – it's sort of naming the "elephant in the room", I guess, since I'm pretty sure you all know me by that story.

So... one day Jesus came to our town. This was very exciting because everybody had heard about Jesus and was eager to welcome him. Well, I was feeling emboldened and confident that day because I had just finished doing what I do best – giving my house a thorough cleaning top to bottom, and then baking fresh bread. I was feeling particularly hospitable and "on my game", speaking domestically. Maintaining and running the household is one of my gifts. I'm good at it and I enjoy it. So I welcomed Jesus into my home! Mary was home at the time, so she and Jesus sat down together and began to visit. I was glad Mary was there to host so that I could go prepare the meal. What I hadn't counted on was that Jesus never traveled alone. The crowds were always there, yes, but those 12 – his closest disciples. They literally went everywhere with him, including into my house. So, I had thought I was preparing dinner for the four of us, but it turned out to be the 16 of us. Before long Jesus had started to speak and teach, as he did and I was left, by myself, to prepare a very large meal.

Now, Mary, bless her heart... Mary and I are sisters but we are very different people. My gifts lie in my strong back and my skilled hands. Her gifts are NOT domestic. She could care less about running a household – smoothly or otherwise. Her gifts lie in her sharp mind and her big heart. So, for her, there's nothing better than to sit at the feet of Jesus and take in his teaching – I mean, really drink it in, every word, and every confounding, upside-down, unexpected turn of phrase. Mary would hang on each idea and you could almost see the wheels of realization

and understanding turning as she listened. She was completely captivated, as if she was hearing something brand new that her very life depended on. Dinner was the farthest thing from her mind or her stomach.

I, on the other hand, felt the pressure of having this house-full of men; they're always hungry! And the expectation that I would produce something wonderful to eat – or, at least something. Anyway... you know the rest. I got irritated and I put Jesus squarely in the middle of my irritation. Rather than just asking Mary if I could please see her in the kitchen for a moment, I let my stress get the best of me and self-righteously demanded that Jesus pay attention - to me - and make her help me! And that's when the correction came...those words are burned into my memory: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one.^[a] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Ooph. I mean, I get it and, of course, he was right. But also... doesn't SOMEBODY have to fix dinner? Well... hearing that story might help you to better understand the story that Karl read. But first – you need to know another part of the story.

My brother Lazarus had gotten really sick. Mary and I sent a message to Jesus – knowing full well that he could heal Lazarus, and believing with all our hearts that he would; Jesus loved and cared for us all! But he didn't come right away when he got the message and Lazarus died. Four days it took Jesus to get there. Lazarus had been dead for four days already. Mary and I were grieving, mostly at the death of our beloved brother, but also out of our deep disappointment that Jesus had not come sooner. When he did finally arrive he wept and grieved with us. We took him to the tomb, at his request and he asked for the stone, the door, to be moved away. Ugh! After four days!? The stench was unbelievable. But Jesus prayed. He thanked God for hearing him and said he was doing this for the sake of the crowd – so that all the people gathered there would believe that God had sent Jesus. And then he yelled, "Lazarus! Come out!" And there came my brother... walking... with his hands and feet and his face, all wrapped up in the grave cloths. And Jesus said to unwrap the cloths and let him go.

What a day. What a miracle! We could hardly believe our eyes – we had Lazarus back! But what we didn't fully comprehend that day was that Lazarus being brought back to life was a certain death sentence for Jesus. The chief priests and the Pharisees were completely undone, terrified and infuriated by this development. They could feel their power slipping through their fingers as Jesus gained more and more followers. They began to plan for Jesus' arrest and death to happen during the time of the Passover festival.

Maybe now you can begin to imagine how special it was, after all of these experiences, to have Jesus in our home again those few days before the Passover.

Once again, I was preparing, cleaning, cooking and serving because... that's what I DO! I was in my element – filled with the joy of being in Jesus' presence. Mary and I had long ago worked out our differences and had actually come to deeply appreciate them in one another! At *this*

event, my fulfillment came in the certainty of the profound confession I had made to Jesus; that He is “the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world”. Serving him and the others dinner that evening was my call, my mission. I could think of nowhere else I would rather have been. And, true to form, Lazarus was there, at the table with Jesus and so was Judas, a friend of ours, and one of Jesus’ close disciples.

And there was Mary... again...still. She was never far from Jesus and that was true on this occasion as well. She was right there. Listening. Smiling. Catching every word. But she did not speak. She took out that big, terribly expensive jar of the most luscious-smelling perfume and filled the whole house with that smell as she began to pour it over Jesus’ feet and then wipe his feet with her long, beautiful hair, as if it were a towel. She was washing his feet with expensive perfume and wiping them dry with her hair. Silent Mary. With her sharp mind and her big heart. She was showing us how to love extravagantly – because that’s how Jesus loves. She was demonstrating how to love selflessly. Like Jesus. Mary had already fully accepted the truth that the rest of us could not yet bear. Jesus’ hour of death was very near – she was both demonstrating her love for him *and* preparing for his burial as a servant king, a king who advocated and worked for the poor, a king who welcomed everyone into his kingdom – even those who rejected him. Mary knew that there was no one beyond the realm of his grace and love. Even Judas.

But ironically, Judas objected! Judas was conflicted. He was a disciple, a follower of Jesus, but he was also a realist. Judas was the keeper of the purse – he knew how much things cost! Who in their right mind would just waste this kind of money!? But Mary knew that long before a gift can be wasted, it must be received. She had watched Jesus provide gifts abundantly – wine at Cana, 5,000 people with plenty to eat plus leftovers, 153 large fish in Peter’s net after there’d been none all night. Mary learned from Jesus that generosity breeds generosity and following Jesus is not necessarily useful, practical or cost effective by the world’s standards. She had learned that our hearts are diminished if the budget is always our first concern. Mary, with her sharp mind and her big heart, showed us that true gifts can’t be controlled. She understood that Jesus was preparing to give his life as a true, extravagant, costly and abundant gift and she was anointing him, blessing him in his giving.

Thank you for listening to these stories. I hope and pray that they’ll continue to be told so that the messages of Jesus and his love will continue to bring hope and salvation to this hurting world. Whether you tell the stories with words – that’s up to you. As Mary showed us, our discipleship is defined by acts of love.

BENEDICTION –

Go now, with the God who loves you extravagantly – share that love. Amen.