



Pastor Gwen's Message  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
"Extravagant Love"  
Sunday March 3, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

This morning we have a very interesting story that is told in different ways in all four of the Gospels. My head with spinning when I read about these four accounts and how they were similar and how they were different from each other. I will save you all the details. Yet I feel that I must comment that because this story is found in all four Gospels it is of great importance. So, let's unpack the message.

Lazarus was dead and Jesus brought him back to life. His sisters, Mary and Martha were delighted to say the least. Lazarus is walking, talking, and laughing with friends who recently had mourned his death. And here we are 6 days before Passover begins. Jesus is in the home of Lazarus, and he and the disciples are being treated to a wonderful meal prepared by Martha. Although this will not be Jesus' last meal, it is his last encounter with his friends, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary that we hear about. For tomorrow Jesus would be on his way and find himself entering Jerusalem to "Hosannas" from the crowd and jeers from his enemies.

At this meal in our text today we hear that Mary comes into the room where the men were ready to eat, with a jar of costly nard and began to wash Jesus' feet with it. Mary as you might remember is usually found at Jesus feet. She loved to listen to his stories and teachings. She was always interested in Jesus'

talking about the kingdom of God. Mary loved to spend time with Jesus. I often get the feeling that Mary was the one that best understood Jesus because she was always willing to listen to Jesus with an open heart and mind.

Well today she has this ointment for Jesus' feet. Nard was imported from India, which in part accounts for its expense. Only the wealthy used it other than for burials where there was a need to cover up the stench of a decaying body. This jar of nard was very expensive, costing around 300 denarii. Today it would be worth about \$119. But in those days a typical wage was denarii a day. So, this perfume was worth a whole year's salary. Expensive. Right?

And Mary, seated at Jesus' feet, the place of a true servant, washes his feet with this nard. No water, no towel. She pours it lavishly on Jesus' feet and then goes on to wipe it off with her hair, her long hair. This was a very unusual act. First, of all women were not even to talk to men, other than their husbands in public. And to let down one's hair was a horror of horrors that only a woman of questionable character would do in public. And as she wipes off Jesus' feet with her hair, the air is filled with the aroma of this perfume.

What was Mary thinking? She used a year's wages to buy this nard and poured it all on Jesus' feet. What would make her so such a thing? And then to defy customs and let down her hair in front of a group full of men. WOW. Has she lost her mind? And guess who steps in to admonish Mary? Yes, Judas, the disciple that was in charge of the common purse. He was a thief and of course the one who will ultimately cash in on betraying Jesus.

I bet Mary did not give heed to Judas's comment as she was deep into her act of devotion to her Lord and Savior, Jesus. With a servant's heart, she gave Jesus the best she had. That flask of pure perfume was special, and she loved Jesus so much that it was a pure act of love. She wanted to give him the best she could.

That folks is what people do when they love one another, when a husband loves his wife, he wants to give her the best and vice versa. Same when a parent loves their child. Parents want the best for their kids, certainly better

than they had it as a child. Even friends that love each other will show their devotion with special gifts and acts of devotion.

I read this story told by Pastor Vince Gerhardy this week:

*One afternoon three children, two boys and a girl, entered a flower shop. They were about 9 or 10 years old, raggedly dressed, but clean. They gazed around the store and nervously approached the owner. One of the boys said, "Sir, we'd like some yellow flowers, please."*

*The man immediately realized that this was a very special occasion. He showed them some inexpensive yellow spring flowers. The boy who was the spokesman for the group shook his head. "I think we'd like something better than that."*

*The man asked, "Do they have to be yellow?" The boy answered, "Yes, sir". You see, Mickey would like 'em better if they were yellow. He had a yellow T-shirt. I guess he'd like yellow better than any other color."*

*The man asked, "Are they for a funeral?"*

*The boy nodded, suddenly choking up. The little girl was struggling to keep back the tears. "She's his sister," the boy said. "He was a great kid. A truck hit him while he was playing in the street." The boy's lips were trembling now. The other boy entered into the conversation. "Us kids have put all our money together. We got eighty cents. Would roses cost an awful lot, sir—yellow roses, I mean."*

*The man smiled. "It just happens that I have some nice yellow roses here that I'm offering special today for eighty cents a dozen." The man pointed to the roses.*

*"Gee, they'd be beaut mister! Yes, Mickey'd sure like those."*

*The man said, "I'll make up a nice bouquet with ferns and ribbons. Where do you want me to send them?" One of the boys responded, "Would it be all*

*right, mister, if we took them with us? We'd kind of like to, you know, give 'em to Mickey ourselves. He'd like it better that way."*

*The florist fixed the bouquet of flowers, accepted the eighty cents, and then watched the youngsters trudge out of the store. Even though he had not made any profit from the sale, he was pleased that he could be generous to those 3 children. They walked down the street carefully holding the bunch of yellow roses. They had spent all their pocket money so that they could give Mickey this last gift of love.*

Those kids showed the same generosity toward their friend, that Mary showed Jesus. Sometimes nothing but the best will do! And it was the same extravagant love that the Prodigal father showed his returning son in our Gospel story last week. Mary, the three kids and the Prodigal father all showed great love. We are reminded that God's love toward us is the most perfect love. Stories like this show God's complete love to us. Our text for today is truly a great story about how extravagant God's love is and how lavish He is with forgiveness even though we do not deserve it.

Mary's actions show us how much we have to be thankful for and how we can demonstrate it in a worldly way. Her devotion to Jesus was unquestionable as she gave boldly the best she had to offer. But that still does not compare to how Jesus gave himself up on the cross to give us abundant life and the promise of eternal life to come.

Next week is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. We will see Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, as our Lenten journey concludes. And so, a few reminders as these 40 days come to a close.

We see Mary's true devotion as she knelt before Jesus in a servant's pose. Not unlike the servant attitude Jesus took as he washed his disciple's feet at the Last Supper. True love and devotion and love for his followers was evident. Jesus came in true service as he was willing to give up his life for ours.

Also, Mary's generous act of devotion reminds us that Jesus did not hold back anything either. His love for humanity came at a huge price, his life. We now have the assurance that we will one day have a life forever in heaven with Him.

I also see in this story that we have an example in Mary of devotion, beyond limits. How is our devotion to God? Is it extravagant, as extravagant as God's

love is for us? His generosity should bring out extravagance in our devotion to Him. It should produce extravagance in praise and worship to God. Nothing but the very best when it comes also to the way we listen to God's word, either read or spoken. It should produce extravagance in how we participate in worship, perhaps being an assisting minister, an usher, altar guild, or even welcoming or inviting visitors to coffee hour and Bible study.

We cannot let the worldly demands, or the devil get in the way as it did for Judas. We must be extravagant in serving others and showing God's love to all who are in need.

I think that this story is also a good reminder that we are too often like Judas. How stingy we can be with our money, the money that God gives us to use. After all, everything we have belongs to God. Using our money, skills and time, the gifts God gave us, to forward His kingdom and to serve others is always a blessing.

The love of Jesus for us should be our guide and motivator for our church to do things, no matter the cost to love and serve God and our neighbor. Sometimes it may feel like taking a risk and putting ourselves up for some criticism like Mary got from Judas. But that is exactly why we must continue to give and give extravagantly. If giving and loving were easy, we would not need this Bible lesson. Love that does not count the cost is exactly the kind of love we are called to emulate. It is the same love that Jesus showed us when he left the next day after Mary anointed his feet with the costly nard, to go and give himself up to death.

Let Lent and this text remind us that we are called to not limit our love because the cost is too high. But instead, remember what God has done for us and respond with extravagant love for God and for our neighbors. **AMEN**