

**Sermon Notes - September 13, 2020**

*“When Saying ‘Thank You’ Doesn’t Seem Enough”*

John 12:1-11

A pastor named Victor Shepherd shared a story about a missionary who came to his church in South Carolina to speak. The missionary was there all week and they had different groups coming in to hear this missionary speak - at night or at lunchtime. One day at lunch, they had invited a group of the local college students to come and hear the missionary. He came to speak about his medical work in the Gaza strip - and he started off his speech this way, “You know you North-American fat cats know nothing about gratitude.” Can’t you imagine their impression when he started that way? Then he went on to tell the story. He said that he served in the Gaza strip as a medical surgeon. He said he went to a lady’s house in the village - where he did surgery on her - and she healed from that surgery. He said that one day he went to visit her and her husband to do a post-operative visit. While he was there, he was going to go visit another post-operative patient. When he passed by her house and checked on her, she begged him to come back and eat lunch with her and her husband. Now, what I need you to know is that they were a dirt-poor couple. They had no children and the husband had suffered from a stroke - and had all kinds of health issues that kept him from working. His wife earned her livelihood through one Angora rabbit, which she would take its hair, spin it into yarn, and sell it at the village market. They had two chickens (laying hens) and the eggs that were produced by the two chickens were what this couple ate every day for meals. The missionary said that he went down the road to check on the other post-operative patient. Two hours later, he came back to eat lunch with the wife and her husband. There was a big pot cooking on an open fire. He went over, took a rag, and opened the lid to smell what was cooking. Inside the pot was the Angora rabbit and two chickens. That was that lady’s livelihood and their food source. He knew that lady would have to work for two days to earn enough money from somebody else to be able to buy two more chickens for food. So, that meant for at least two days, she would be begging for food for herself and her husband. He said, “I stood there with tears in my eyes as she said, ‘Thank you for operating

on me. Thank you for making me well.' *Every time I think of that story, I think of the sacrificial gratitude that she had - and I cry every time.*"

**There's a woman in the Bible named Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who was so grateful for Jesus that she gave the best gift she had.** Now, we don't know if she was from a wealthy family - but we think that this gift was some sort of heirloom that had been left to her by parents or grandparents. It was a stone jar, about 5 to 7 inches tall, and it had about 12 ounces of expensive perfume or ointment inside. This kind of ointment was not unusual to be used at someone's burial - to prepare the body for burial - because they did not embalm bodies then like they do today. They would use spices, herbs, ointments, and perfumes on the body. It was believed that maybe she was saving that jar for something special. That special day came when Jesus came in their lives. We don't know if she was the woman in the other gospels that had a sinful past and Jesus had forgiven her or if it was just her gratitude for the raising of her brother, Lazarus, from the dead. *Maybe it's both - that she was so in love and grateful to Jesus for what he had done for her and her brother that she wanted to give the best gift she had - and that was this jar of expensive ointment.*

Have you ever had somebody to do something for you in gratitude and then you had somebody in the family or a friend to kind of poo-poo on it - dampen, weaken, and lessen the importance of what that person did for you? Well, that's what Judas did for Mary's gift to Jesus. He came in and said, "Listen lady - what are you doing pouring this expensive ointment on him? Why that could've been sold for three hundred denarii! That's enough wages for a man for a whole year - for a man to feed his whole family for a year! We could have fed the poor with that." Jesus looks at him and says, "Judas, leave her alone. You won't always have me with you but you'll always have the poor with you." Now, was Jesus saying that we don't care about the poor? - No. He quoted from the Deuteronomy law that said, "You will always have poor people in the land, but therefore I command you to be open-handed to your brother and to the poor and needy in the land." *In other words, keep giving and sharing to those who are poor and needy - there will always be some poor*

*people in the land.* But, Jesus said, “You are not going to always have me here – physically with you. She is honoring me.” Can you imagine? ... This was about 6 days before Jesus was to be betrayed and crucified. He’s preoccupied. Wouldn’t you be preoccupied if you were going to die and be beaten? Jesus said, “Listen Judas, she did this for my burial.” I think she may have done it for both. I think she did it out of gratitude – but I also think that Jesus shared with them, just like he did with the 12 disciples because they were close friends. He told them three times or more that he was going to be betrayed, arrested, crucified, and rise after three days. I can’t help but think that he told Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that same thing. Maybe Mary did this out of gratitude, but she also did it to prepare his body, as he said. Jesus was preoccupied with his upcoming passion and death. Mary was overwhelmed with gratitude. She taught us a lot about humility and servanthood and gratitude.

How do you show your gratitude to somebody who has done something special for you – especially the extravagant gift that Jesus gave us – He sacrificed his life for us? ***I think we do it through our actions – and not just our words.*** Sometimes our words just aren’t enough. Some of you may remember the late Congressman Sam Rayburn. He was a Congressman for 50 years! He was from Texas. For the last ten years of his time in Congress, he was the Speaker of the House. Folks do not remember him for his political actions – *but they do remember him for his common touch and his love of people.* The story is told – and it’s a true story – that Sam Rayburn had a way of touching people’s lives with his kindness and compassion and sensitivity. There was a reporter in Washington, D.C. who often criticized him for decisions that he made, often in front of groups of people. One day, Sam Rayburn found out that this reporter had lost his daughter to cancer. She had lost the battle that she had been fighting for two or three years. She was young, in her 20s. Sam Rayburn, who was supposed to have a meeting with the President, called the President and said, “I’m sorry, Sir, but I can’t meet with you today. I have a friend in trouble and I need to go check on him.” He got his security detail to find out where this reporter lived – and they took him to the reporter’s home. When he got there, he got out of the car by himself, walked to the house, and knocked on the door. The reporter

answered the door and said, “Mr. Speaker, what are you doing here?” He said, “I heard about your daughter. I wanted to express my condolences and see if there was anything that I could do for you - anything?” The guy said, “I don’t know of anything, sir. My wife and I are just trying to figure out funeral arrangements.” He said, “Have you had your coffee this morning?” The man said, “No. I haven’t even thought about my coffee this morning. I’ve not eaten or drunk anything.” He said, “Come on in the house. I am going to make your coffee for you and let you talk about your daughter. If you don’t want to talk, you don’t have to.” He went in, made coffee, and they sat there for two hours just talking. When that was over, the news reporter said, “Do you think I’ll ever forget that kindness to me at a time when I needed it the most? No. It was the most gracious, compassionate, kindest thing that the Speaker of the House could’ve done for me. I may not remember all the things that he did politically, but I’ll never forget his kindness.” I say that because I want you to remember something that’s in this gospel lesson: at the end of Matthew and Mark’s gospel, it says, “This story will be remembered. Wherever the gospel is preached, what this lady did for me will be told in memory of her.”

I want you to know that every kind act, every compassionate, sensitive thing you do will be remembered by Jesus. He remembers it and it shows that we honor him. It shows our gratitude back to him. Some of you will remember when Jimmy Carter was President. There was a time during his presidency that Hubert Humphrey died – and he was carried to Washington, D.C. for the funeral service. All the Presidents and former politically dignitaries had gathered for this funeral service. Richard Nixon came in through a side door by himself – nobody with him and nobody greeted him. He came in and stood in the corner because nobody wanted anything to do with him after his resignation and the Watergate scandal. He was considered political poison. Nobody spoke to him. The President at that time, Mr. Jimmy Carter walked in. He greeted some of the former Presidents, the political dignitaries, walked around the casket, and then he saw Richard Nixon in the corner by himself. The news reporters tell us that President Jimmy Carter went over to Richard Nixon, stuck out his hand, embraced him, and said, “Welcome home, Mr.

President. Welcome home.” It was said that became a turning point for Richard Nixon. It was not until months after that event that some of his political allies consulted him about foreign policy – because he was known to be good at foreign policy. Richard Nixon told many people that the turning point in his life came in that act of compassion and empathy by Jimmy Carter. I don’t think he ever forgot that, do you? I don’t think that news reporter ever forgot what Sam Rayburn did for him at a time when he needed it.

One of the ways that we show our gratitude to God is through our attitudes and our actions. Sometimes it’s just in caring for somebody else. Many of you are very aware, as I am, of the political climate that we live in. There’s a lot of disunity but we need to be more caring about one another as a people of God. There’s a story told by a pastor friend that served in Camden, South Carolina. He said that there was a couple in his church named Mr. Joe and Ms. Betty. They had been married 65 years. They didn’t have any children. Joe was a deacon and a Sunday School teacher – well-loved and well thought of. He and his wife had been sweethearts since childhood and they still acted like sweethearts after 65 years. Everybody at church admired this couple. One night Betty died in her sleep and the pastor said that he was privileged to do the funeral service for her. At the funeral service, he noticed a young man (in his 40s) that he knew was not related to Joe or Betty, biologically. He was one of the pallbearers and a member of their church; his name was Gene. The pastor didn’t know how Gene and Joe knew each other. When the casket came in, Gene went to sit beside Joe and had his arm around Joe for the whole service. When the service was over, they came back to the church for the meal. The pastor asked Joe how he knew Gene. Joe responded, “Oh, we’re neighbors. We’ve been neighbors for the last ten years. In fact, Gene has late classes on Wednesday, so we’ve had coffee and breakfast every Wednesday for the past ten years. He’s a good man. He’s like a son to me. I’d do anything for him – and I think he’d do anything for me.” The pastor went to the table where Gene was and said, “I found out that you and Joe are good friends.” Gene said, “Oh yeah. We’ve known each other for a long time. He’d do anything for me and I’d do anything for him. Do you know that we are political opposites? He’s a

Republican and I'm a Democrat. He's conservative and I'm liberal. We cancel out each other's votes and we just laugh about it - but you know, I'd do anything for him and he'd do anything for me. In fact, two years ago, my youngest sister died in a tragic car accident. I was devastated because that was the only sister I had. My parents had already died. When the police arrived at my house that night, Joe saw the police car and he came by to see what was going on and if there was anything he could do. Joe sat up with me from 10:00 that night - all night - and listened to me talk and cry and tell him about my sister and what she meant to me. *I'll never forget that.* Joe didn't have to say anything - he just sat there and listened. I'd do anything for that man and he'd do anything for me - except vote the way he does."

*I want you to know that God calls us to care about all people and to love one another.* One of the greatest ways that we honor and show our gratitude is not just with our words but with our attitudes and our actions. ***It's okay to be extravagant in our compassion and our sensitivity and our caring. It's okay to be extravagant in our gratitude. How do we show our gratitude to God? ... In our attitudes and our actions.*** Even in this trying time, he demands the best of us - **and when we do it, we glorify our Lord and Savior.** He gave his very best for us - may we give our best to him - whether it be in our time, our talents, our actions, or our attitudes. May God be glorified. May we go and do likewise. Amen.