

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood, Mar 13, 2016

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Notes for the sermon on Extravagant Love

John 12:1-8 – Sermon Text = John 12:3

***Mary took a pound of costly perfume made
of pure nard,
anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.
The house was filled
with the fragrance of the perfume.***

[Hymns = 691, 694, 698]

**Key focus = how do we fill our congregation and the lives that are nourished in it
to spread the fragrance of Mary's kind of love everywhere we go
and with everyone we touch**



The House was Filled with the Fragrance of Extravagant Love

- If Mary was buying a pound of nard today, it would have cost her over \$2000 – costly perfume indeed – the essential oil is made from spikenard, a plant grown primarily in South East Asia – so it would have been imported into the Palestine of Mary's day
- I couldn't find anything about a tradition in Mary's time of wiping feet with hair – so that's another surprising element in this act of extravagant love – a unique act of devotion, as she bows her head to Jesus' feet to massage in the oil – an ancient form of reflexology?

Absorbing the Example of Mary

- An extravagant act of respect and reverence – arising from the new life her encounter with the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ had given her – a former prostitute – used and abused for pleasure and instant gratification – fearful of what her next ‘John’ might do to her – divided from her family and former friends as she lives in the shadows and back alleys of her society - now, following Jesus, her life has changed dramatically – she is accepted, respected, loved – her dignity and worth are recognized by God in the flesh – in the glory/energy of God’s love, her life is restored to its original beauty – it’s a beauty that never disappeared to God, but it was distorted and denigrated by others and by Mary herself – in her encounter with Jesus, she realizes at her very core that she is a beloved friend of God – gratitude for that redemption is the source of this act of extravagant love
- Whatever our past, whatever things we have done in public or in private that shame us and suppress us, this same acceptance and redemption is there for us
- Then, what acts of extravagant love can you imagine expressing your gratitude for such grace – for this welcome home from the pig pens of our society – let me suggest very briefly the possibility of supporting, with time, talent, and treasure, those communities that carry this kind of love into our fearful and divided world – institutions like this church, Brentwood Presbyterian – as you will see in our annual report, we have an ambitious plans for next year to expand our abilities to nourish souls to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ through worship, learning, fellowship and service – faithfully executing those plans depends, to a significant extent, on your continuing generosity and support – all of which is an expression of gratitude to the grace God is nourishing within and around you

Filling Brentwood with the Fragrance of God’s Extravagant Love

- In the last couple of weeks, we have witnessed in our Scripture texts, stories of God’s extravagant love – the welcoming father, the devoted follower – their extravagance arises as a response to God’s extravagance – their extravagance blesses those in need around them – the shamed son who is welcomed home, the exhausted rebel who is facing certain death – how are we showing that kind of extravagant love here at Brentwood?
- Let me quickly mention three ways that I value greatly – 1) the welcome extended to a anyone who walks through our doors – Sunday morning, Wed evening, ted talks, concerts – authentic, sincere, consistent – a genuine and graceful welcome home – 2) willingness to try news ways of offering our space to people who are seeking the common good of God’s creation – 3) ongoing stewardship of our gifts and resources to strengthen and expand the Commonwealth of God in our neighbourhood and city
- May God bless us and move us to increase our practices of extravagant love in his service