

Sermon for Sunday April 3, 2022

John 12:1-11

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God

I have delightful news – some of you may already be aware - our church family has been blessed to receive two substantial legacy gifts. One gift comes from an anonymous giver and the other from the estate of Mary and Keith Davidson. Our gratitude runs deep as we accept and discern how to use these precious gifts.

All legacy donations, unless otherwise indicated, will be, according to our church policy, divided three ways: 1/3 to capital for the care of our building, 1/3 to an endowment fund and 1/3 for the purpose of outreach ministry for projects that will fulfill our mission. It has been the responsibility of the Outreach Committee to prayerfully discern and then recommend to the board, a possible use for that last 1/3 of the gift. Currently the Board is considering using the funds to build a modest kitchen. Nothing is finalized and much investigation into costs and location need to be accomplished but the outreach committee and the board were very excited to think about how a kitchen might be used to further our mission. We considered how the kitchen might be used within our community to build connection and also about how the kitchen might be used outside of our community as a place of welcome, learning and care. There is much work yet to be done, and of course, nothing will go ahead without congregational consultation. It has been such a blessing to consider how to use these generous gifts.

My hunch is that many of you have already made arrangements to make a legacy gift to the church, and some of you may currently be

considering such a gift, and I am profoundly moved by the outpouring of such generous actions. I am humbled to think that previous and current members of our faith family have been so inspired to pour out such gifts because they love this place, this community and our efforts to live love into the world. It is because the donors have been touched by this place and inspired by what we strive to do here, as followers of Jesus, that they want to continue to care for this place and ministry and ensure it is here for generations to come. And further I believe the generosity has happened because this community of faith has provided a space for the givers to connect to the source of their strength and purpose - Jesus the Christ.

((I know this generous outpouring of gifts is not exclusive to McClure and I am sure our partner churches of Carlyle and Radville have their own stories of extravagant generosity as well. Delightful news. //)))

Friends, next week we begin Holy Week and we begin this holy week by remembering the triumphant journey of Jesus into Jerusalem. Next week is Palm Sunday and we will remember the crowd's enthusiasm and shouts of Hosanna, their welcoming of their presumed new king. Of course Jesus won't be the type of king they expect and he will not leave Jerusalem alive - he will be tried there for treason, convicted, and put to death.

Today's story from the Gospel of John, takes place shortly before Jesus takes that ride on the donkey. You might say it's the eve of Palm Sunday. And since Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and he knows that the trip there is perhaps his last, he stops by the house of some of his closest friends. It's the home of Martha, of Mary, and of Lazarus, located in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem.

In their home, there is rest and there is a meal, just as there has been many times before. In the story, you see again Martha busying herself with the cooking and the serving. Their brother Lazarus is also there, newly brought back from the dead. And then there is Mary, who predictably sits at Jesus' feet. Only this time, she's not there to listen but to do something else.

The Gospel says that Mary "took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and she anointed the feet of Jesus, and then she wiped his feet with her hair." ///Now, the nard came from the spikenard plant, and typically only royalty or those in holy office were anointed with it. It was kept in a sealed jar made of alabaster or marble, and thereby could last for decades. Once opened, though, the nard would spoil quickly and lose its pungency.

Mary possesses such a precious jar. Perhaps she had bought it to anoint her brother who had died but, in the end, did not need it. And rather than keep it, she breaks the seal, and she opens it. And then she spreads some over Jesus' feet - the rest - she would end up using shortly at Jesus' burial. Right now, though, Mary only anoints Jesus' feet. It is the place she is closest to, right there on the ground, in a position that you and I sometimes assume whenever we pray on our knees.

The ointment, we are told, is worth three hundred denarii, the savings of a lifetime. Not only that, but Mary, now wipes the remainder off with her hair. Mary's anointing is extravagant - Mary is pouring her savings unto Jesus, letting her hands and her hair do the talking as if to say: "I'm pouring out, to you, my entire life." It is a beautiful and deeply generous act of devotion.

To pour oneself out for someone?

Have you ever done that, or are you doing it now? If you are a parent or grandparent, or a caregiver, you can relate. You pour yourself out for **them**, don't you? You do with less to boost their finances, saving for their University fund, maybe helping with rent, or stocking their fridge. Or you pour yourself out in other than monetary ways - You cut your vacation short so you can babysit. You move closer, to them, so as to be in a better position to help out. You make extra time to listen and be present. Do you record all this in a ledger expecting to get something in return? I bet you don't.

And that's how it is with us - we pour ourselves out in love.

That is how it is with us and our Jesus, at our best we pour ourselves out **for his** sake and for the sake of his church. We give away talents and skills, we give away help and assistance, and we part with money, fully aware that what we are giving is not to the ministers, not to the staff, not to the board or trustees, but we're giving to the life of Christ.

Who would think of tallying up the hours that we spend each week - phone calls made, note cards written, the visits made, the lesson plan studied, the agenda outlined for a committee meeting, the minutes written up, the communion table and sanctuary decorated, the contractors' quotes compared, the worship service, music and sermon prepared, the staff responsibilities coordinated, disagreements and tensions managed, joys and celebrations marked?

Who of you keeps a ledger of what counts for ministry? Like Mary, we just do. We just do - by opening that jar of gifts and pouring something of ourselves out without expecting a return.

And still, whatever jar we open for Jesus – it will not go unnoticed. It says in the scripture lesson that the perfume of it “filled” the entire house. It

worked its way into the four corners of the room. It wafted under the table and over cushions; it billowed into drawers and cabinets, and it made its presence known. Do you know that your works of mercy, your works of love, do just that? They issue an aroma that's pleasant like aromatherapy, so people in the room breathe easier and take a sigh of relief. I hope you know that there are people who breathe easier because of you.

Not everyone is happy with the perfumed room though. "Frivolous women's nonsense," Judas says. //He says that about Mary's extravagance. And it's not just Judas, because the other three Gospels report that all twelve disciples take issue with her. What do you think you are doing? they are saying. What a waste of money!

But Mary knows what she is doing. She knows why she is pouring herself out. I think you can probably guess. She does it because earlier Mary had sat at Jesus' feet, she had spent time listening - learning from him and she had made Jesus' words her own.

Friends, think about that. All our ministry, all our volunteer efforts, every offering given, every good deed done in the name of Christ is the result of first having sat at Jesus' feet, of having communed with him, pondered his words and making them our own. Friends, we know why we do what we do, and we know that Jesus is worth the cost.

So, we will **not** stop filling the room with the aroma of our poured-out selves even in these challenging and uncertain times. We will not stop filling the room with the aroma of our poured-out selves because the poor Jesus spoke about will one day know a world fragrant with justice and hope.

We will not stop pouring out our lives.

Amen.