

Written Copy: John 12:4-8 "Is It About 'Get'? Or Is It 'Give'?"

Midweek Advent #1

Wednesday, March 9th, 2022

Text: John 12:4-8

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial." ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Exegetical Statement

Jesus and the disciples are invited to dinner at Simon the Leper's house where they are honored guests along with Lazarus and his sisters. Martha shows her love for Jesus by doing her sacrificial gift of serving. Mary shows her love sacrificially by anointing Jesus with expensive nard and doing it so extravagantly that it flows from His head, down His body, and all over His feet. Mary assumes the role of the lowest servant by rubbing and washing His feet with it, and then in an act of humble adoration uses her own hair to wipe up the excess. Judas on the other hand takes exception to the extravagant display by saying the better use of the cost of this perfume, which was worth a years wages, was to give it to the poor. In truth he didn't care about the poor, but wanted to get his hands on it as the disciple's treasurer and skim some off the top. Jesus defends Mary's actions by revealing her gift of love will be used by the Father in ways they could not imagine, to anoint His body for the burial to come. Not only is Judas incited against Jesus, but through the witness of Lazarus raising the people are believing in Jesus, which incites the chief priests to kill not only Jesus, but Lazarus too.

Focus Statement:

Jesus came giving all He had, giving His life over to suffering and death. He did this to forgive all the times and the ways we focus on getting instead of giving. We stand forgiven because He took our punishment and gave to us His obedience. And He pours into our hearts through our baptism His love, the source of all acts of generosity in our lives. His unconditional and sacrificial love works in us to make us more like Mary and less like Judas. And when we see the Judas in our life we give that sin over to Jesus, knowing by faith He has already taken care of it

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We like Judas prefer to get instead of give. In our giving of time, talents, and treasures, when we withhold what God has given for use in His kingdom to bless others and share the Gospel, we are no different than Judas' keeping some of the offering for ourselves.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Continue to struggle with the Spirit through His work in the means of grace as He works to make us more like Mary and less like Judas

Subject Sentence: Christ moves us to give with His unselfish love

Introduction

Shalom everyone. I'm back! Your Pastor has graciously invited me to return this evening to visit and speak with you. I understand you had a supper just a bit ago. I will try to keep you interested and awake. You know, your Pastor invited me to come now, but didn't say anything about coming to dinner! Nonetheless I am here to share with you my eyewitness account from which those verses up there are referring to. It's the account in my Gospel Letter you call "Mary Anoints Jesus" along with some details that my fellow disciples Matthew and Peter (who dictated his to John Mark) as we were directed by the Holy Spirit directed me.

The Text

It begins 6 days before we celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. And it's also the evening before lamb selection day. You know this as your "Palm Sunday": the day when Jesus' rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. I'm not here to share that story with you, you'll hear about that in 4-weeks from now I believe.

We arrived in Bethany, a town 2 miles southeast of Jerusalem on the road to the city. We arrived just before sundown when the Sabbath ended. We came to the house of a man we called "Simon the Leper"; not because he still was one, Jesus took care of that. He was hosting a supper and Jesus and we disciples were honored guests. Also invited was a citizen of Bethany who had recently become the talk of the town and of all Jerusalem, as well as among the other pilgrims who, like us, were headed to Jerusalem for Passover. This was Lazarus, who was raised from the dead by Jesus. He was there along with his two sisters: Mary and Martha. Martha was busy giving of her time and talents as a waitress for the feast, setting the table and serving. This was how she showed her love for Jesus, who had brought her beloved brother back to life.

Mary also loved Jesus too, very much. And she showed her unselfish and sacrificial love in a different manner. She had obtained a vial of pure nard oil, very very expensive stuff. Nard didn't come from around the part of the world we live in, it was brought by the caravan traders all the way from the country you call India. It was 12 oz of pure nard that would've cost a whole year's wages for a common laborer. What was so remarkable was what she did with it. She anointed Jesus with it, using all of it. She began by pouring it on His head. But not only His head, she poured it liberally onto His feet. She used that oil to wash the dirt off Jesus' feet and to anoint and purify them. Then I saw her do something even more surprising. She had so liberally applied this nard to Jesus' feet that it had to be wiped off, so she used her hair. Her hair! She wiped the oil and the dirt that it washed off, wiping it onto her hair. What she was doing was the task of the lowest most menial slave in the house. Yet she, one of Jesus' close friends, did it to show him the unselfish love she had for her Lord, in response to Him raising her brother back to life.

Well someone took exception to this gracious act of love; and I think you know who: Judas. Now I want you to keep in mind that at that time none of us knew of the change of heart that had happened and was happening to him. He was the so called “treasurer” of our band of disciples. People would give money to support our ministry, and he carried the money bag upon himself. If supplies were needed, he paid for them. No one questioned his motives or method until after he had hung himself. But that’s a story for another time.

Judas pointed out that the nard oil, instead of being poured out, could’ve been sold and helped some of the poor surrounding us. I mean think of it, Passover was coming, people had to buy all the things needed to celebrate the meal, there were families struggling to afford it, not to mention those who begged outside the temple gates. At first, I myself and some of my brothers began to wonder if Judas didn’t have a point. What did Jesus need to be anointed for anyway? He was not being anointed king or priest, and he was not dead. Maybe it was a loving sign Mary did, but it was far too extravagant. I expected Jesus to concur with this.

It was only later I realized something that Jesus already knew. Judas had no interest in helping the poor. Not really. It sounded good though. And it was a great cover for what he had secretly going on. Just as one hand deposited money into the money bag that he carried, his other hand surreptitiously skimmed money out for him to use for his own private purposes. I can’t tell you how or when that started, but my guess is that when it did, it started small. Maybe he needed a few coins for something and just didn’t tell Jesus or us. But that innocuous beginning grew in the amount he pilfered. The temptation that money bag had over him was beyond his control. His love of money was his secret sin that he never really repented of. And looking back, I know that Jesus knew all along too. And the amazing thing is He let Judas keep the money bag and keep skimming. I wish I could tell you why, but Jesus never shared that with me. And as far as the mind of the Lord goes, it is dangerous to speculate on what has not been revealed in the mind of God.

Now Judas words were an open accusation of wrongdoing directed toward Mary. But in a way, a way that he may not have even realized at the time, they stood in accusation of Jesus, who allowed Mary to continue. Basically Judas was accusing them both of doing what was sinful, stealing from the poor. It’s one thing to accuse Mary, or any of us of sinfulness. We all are sinners. But we never saw Jesus do anything sinful. And I’m here to testify to you that He in His life on this earth never sinned against the will of God in thought, word, or deed.

John 12:7-8 ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Therefore Mary didn't have to defend herself. Jesus set us all straight on what this was. This was truly Mary's gift of love to her Savior and Lord. But it was more than that in the hands of the Holy Spirit. It was prophetic as to what was to come in 6 days. Jesus was going to suffer horribly, give His life on the cross, and be buried in someone else's tomb. He would die and be pulled off the cross just before sundown, with no time for anyone to prepare his body for burial. So Mary, although she didn't realize it, was doing that preparation now. It was another sign that we disciples missed that Jesus knew what was to come, that it was the Father's will and plan for Him. And He was going forward to fulfill it even though He knew how awful He would suffer. Mary did this as her unselfish gift of love for Jesus. It looked forward to Jesus greater unselfish gift of love for all mankind. You've heard it said that you can't out give Jesus, not when you consider He gave His very life for those who hated Him, all out of a love that is beyond my ability and your ability to completely comprehend.

What it means to You

Our God is a gracious giver, and we see that most clearly in His gift of His only Son as the atoning sacrifice for all men. What does that kind of love shown in selfless giving do to those who come in contact with it? It changes hearts and minds! It changes us from being takers into becoming givers. Without Jesus love and the faith that goes with it we all are takers, we love to get, but don't want to give back, not unless it has some upside, some benefit for us personally, not unless there is some way we can skim some off the top. But when that love that moved Jesus to die for you invades your heart by faith, it can move you to give in a like manner. It can move you to give of your time, talents, and treasures to be a part of the ministry He has for His Church to do, the ministry that is sharing His love with others through word and deed.

Now when that love comes into your heart, it doesn't change you automatically. We still have that sinful taker, that sinful Judas like heart buried within us, waiting for the right opportunity to tell us how wonderful it is to be a taker and not a giver. But what happens when all you do is take and hold tightly the gifts the LORD has given for the good of other as well as you? You have a show I've heard tell of called hoarders. That's perhaps an extreme example of how cluttered taking and holding can make your life. But even if you are not a hoarder, when you fail to be the giver God wants you to be, you miss out on the blessing that comes from giving. That blessing is the loving feeling that expressed itself in Mary's actions that day. It's the loving feeling you have when you make new friends and have a hand in spreading the Gospel through your word and actions.

Conclusion

Jesus is that God of gracious giving. You and I are often like Judas. And before you take issue with that remember this and repeat it with me: (**1 John 1:8-9**) **⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** Jesus came so that we can be forgiven of all our Judas moments. And He sent His Spirit into your hearts through your baptism so that each day, through means of grace, He works on you to be more and more like Mary, like an unselfish giver. More like He Himself is. Thank you for staying awake. I hope to see you again soon. Shalom!