

John 12: 1-8

I DID A FUNERAL THIS PAST WEEK FOR A WOMAN WHO SAVED EVERYTHING AND WASTED NOTHING. HER CHILDREN SHARED THAT GROWING UP THEY WASHED THEIR ZIPLOC BAGS. CLOTHES WERE WORN WAY PAST THEIR STYLE EXPIRATION DATES. NOBODY EVER DARED ADJUSTING THE THERMOSTAT..IF THEY WERE TOO COLD THEY KNEW TO PUT ON A SWEATER. LINED UP IN THEIR FRIDGE WERE TUPPERWARE CONTAINERS CONTAINING SPECIMENS OF FOOD SO SMALL THAT THEY WONDERED IF THEY WERE MEANT TO BE EATEN OR STUDIED UNDER A MICROSCOPE. THEIR MOTHER EARNED THIS WAY OF LIFE HONESTLY AS SHE WAS THE YOUNGEST OF 8 CHILDREN, GROWING UP POOR DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION. SOMETIMES THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH FOOD TO FEED EIGHT CHILDREN. THERE WERE NO MARGINS. NOTHING WENT TO WASTE.

AS A CONSEQUENCE HER CHILDREN GREW UP WITH THE BELIEF THAT FRUGALITY WAS NEXT TO SAINTLY. SPENDING LESS ON THEMSELVES MEANT THEY HAD MORE TO SHARE WITH OTHERS. PERHAPS SOME OF YOU GREW UP THIS WAY AS WELL. AND IT CAN BE ABSOLUTELY TRUE..FRUGALITY CAN AND DOES ENABLE GENEROSITY. BUT IT CAN ALSO MAKE US HARD-HEARTED, STINGY, JUGMENTAL. IT CAN MAKE US LIKE JUDAS IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING.

MARY POURS OUT AN EXCESSIVE AMOUNT OF PERFUME FOR JESUS. SCHOLARS ESTIMATE IN TODAY'S TERMS WE'RE TALKING OVER \$20,000 WORTH OF PRECIOUS PERFUME Poured OUT ON JESUS' FEET. A POUND OF PERFUME. THAT WOULD TAKE ME AN ENTIRE LIFETIME TO USE UP.

YOU DIDN'T JUST DO THAT. IT WAS HUGELY EXPENSIVE..NEARLY A YEAR'S WORTH OF A LABORER'S WAGES, AND MOST OF IT PROBABLY HIT THE FLOOR. IT WAS A WASTE AND EVERYONE KNEW IT. NOTHING WILL BEGIN A CONVERSATION LIKE AN EXTRAVAGANT GIFT. WHETHER IT'S WITH FAMILY OPENING CHRISTMAS GIFTS, A CHARITABLE DONATION, OR A GIFT TO THE CHURCH, THERE ARE PLENTY OF STORIES OF HOW AN OVER-THE-TOP EXTRAVAGANT GIFT CHANGES THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE ROOM. ALL OF A SUDDEN QUESTIONS AND SUSPICIONS FORM AROUND THE GIVER'S REASONS. DID THE GIFT COME WITH STRINGS ATTACHED? DID THE GIVER RECENTLY GET A RAISE? THE GIFT HAD TO BE ON SALE. POSSIBLY THE GIVER WAS RE-GIFTING IT AND DIDN'T EVEN BUY IT.

LOOK AT JUDAS IN OUR READING. AFTER MARY'S ACT OF DEVOTION, JUDAS JUMPS IN AND IMMEDIATELY RESPONDS TO HER GIFT WITH SKEPTICISM, ALL THE WHILE BEING THE HYPOCRITE WHO WILL TURN ON JESUS.

THERE ARE NUMEROUS ATTITUDES SURROUNDING EXTRAVAGENT GIFTS.

A GROUP OF PASTORS FROM VARIOUS COMMUNITY CHURCHES MET TO DISCUSS GENEROSITY AND STEWARDSHIP. ONE PASTOR SPOKE ABOUT OFFERING A GIFT DIRECTLY TO

GOD, WHILE THE OTHERS BEGAN YAWNING. THEN THE PASTOR PULLED OUT A \$100 BILL, SET IT ON FIRE IN AN ASHTRAY, AND PRAYED, "LORD, I OFFER THIS GIFT TO YOU, AND YOU ALONE."

THE REACTION IN THE ROOM WAS ELECTRIC. THE OTHER CLERGY BEGAN TO FIDGET IN THEIR CHAIRS, WATCHING THE MONEY GO UP IN SMOKE AS IF IT WERE PERFUME. ONE WHISPERED IT WAS ILLEGAL TO BURN CURRENCY. ANOTHER WAS HEARD TO MURMUR, "IF HE IS GIVING MONEY AWAY, MAYBE HE HAS A FEW MORE OF THOSE." THERE WAS NERVOUS LAUGHTER AROUND THE ROOM.

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND?" ASKED THE PASTOR. "I AM OFFERING IT TO GOD, AND THAT MEANS IT IS GOING TO CEASE TO BE USEFUL FOR THE REST OF US." IT WAS A VERY ANXIOUS MOMENT.

WE HAVE DEVELOPED OUR PERSONAL APPROACHES TO GIVING.

A WOMAN NAMED MARY WASTED PERFUME ON JESUS. WE CAN SPECULATE ON HER REASONS. BECAUSE OF WHERE THIS STORY FALLS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, WE CAN SURMISE SHE FELT GRATITUDE FOR JESUS' BRINGING HER BROTHER LAZARUS BACK TO LIFE...A STORY THAT HAPPENS IN THE CHAPTER BEFORE OUR STORY. THE RAISING OF LAZARUS INITIATED THE PLOT AGAINST JESUS (JOHN 11: 45-53). IN FACT, RIGHT AFTER MARY'S DISPLAY OF LOVE COMES THE CHIEF PRIEST'S DECISION TO KILL LAZARUS..JESUS' CLOSEST FRIEND. SCRIPTURE READS: "WHEN THE GREAT CROWD OF THE JEWS LEARNED THAT JESUS WAS THERE, THEY CAME NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF JESUS BUT ALSO TO SEE LAZARUS, WHOM HE HAD RAISED FROM THE DEAD. SO, THE CHIEF PRIESTS PLANNED TO PUT LAZARUS TO DEATH AS WELL, SINCE IT WAS ON ACCOUNT OF HIM THAT MANY OF THE JEWS WERE DESERTING AND WERE BELIEVING IN JESUS."

MARY ALSO TREATS JESUS' BODY AS THOUGH IT WERE ALREADY DEAD AND ANNOINTS IT. MARY USES HER EXPENSIVE PERFUME TO ANOINT HIM AND THEREBY INVESTS IN THE DEATH OF JESUS. HER INVESTMENT IS A PORTRAYAL OF THE SHARING IN HIS SUFFERINGS THAT PAUL COMMENDS.

CURIOSLY, JESUS DOES NOT TAKE ISSUE WITH THE NATURE OF MARY'S GIFT. HE DECLARES IT APPROPRIATE IN THAT MOMENT, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF HIS IMPENDING DEATH. JESUS IS GRACIOUS ENOUGH TO RECEIVE THE GIFT WITH GRATITUDE.

THINK ABOUT IT, LOTS OF EXTRAVGANT GIFTS ARE PUT INTO THE AIR, WHERE THEY SOON EVAPORATE. GIFTS OFFERED TO JESUS. THOSE KIND OF GIFTS OTHER MIGHT SEE AS "WASTEFUL GIFTS". IT'S A WASTE OF TIME COMING HERE EACH SUNDAY WHEN YOU COULD BE HOME ENJOYING YOUR COFFEE. IT'S A WASTE OF TIME PUTTING SO MUCH TIME INTO A SERMON THAT IS HEARD AND GONE IN 15 MINUTES. IT'S A WASTE OF TIME FOR MJ TO

PRACTICE HER PRELUDE AND THREE MINUTES LATER IT IS GONE. WHY DO WE DO THIS? LOVE HAS ITS REASONS. HOWEVER, THESE ACTS AREN'T AS SHORT LIVED AS SOME MIGHT THINK, FOR ONCE WE BREAK OPEN THE JAR OF OUR LOVE FOR JESUS, THE FRAGRANCE OF OUR ACTIONS ARE CARRIED ON THE WIND TO PLACES WE WILL NEVER SEE. TO BE THE CHURCH REQUIRES A MARY-KIND OF LOVE. A WILLINGNESS TO WASTE OURSELVES FOR THE ONE WE LOVE, JESUS.

EITHER WE LOVE GENEROUSLY, OR WE DON'T. IF YOU TIP THE SCALES ON THE GENEROUS SIDE, THEN YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE WHEN OTHERS SAY THINGS LIKE, "YOU DIDN'T JUST DO THAT" OR "HOW MUCH DID YOU GIVE?" EITHER WE ARE ALREADY ENGAGED IN SHARING GOD'S ABUNDANCE WITH OTHERS, OR WE ARE HOARDING WHAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE SHARED.

WHAT DOES LOVE SMELL LIKE? FRESHLY BAKED COOKIES? A DOZEN FRAGRANT ROSES? THE SCENT OF THE PERFUME YOUR MOTHER WORE? SCIENTISTS SAY THAT WHILE WORDS GO TO THE THINKING PART OF THE BRAIN, SMELLS—FRAGRANCES—GO TO THE EMOTIONAL PART, THE AMYGDALA. THAT'S WHY THE SCENT OF YOUR MOTHER'S PERFUME BRINGS YOUR MOTHER BACK FOR A BRIEF MOMENT.

I LOVE THE LAST WORDS IN VERSE 3: *AND THE HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF THE PERFUME.* OF COURSE, WHEN MARY USED THE OINTMENT, THE FRAGRANCE FLOWED EVERYWHERE. SHE USED A POUND OF PERFUME...A POUND. SO I'M GUESSING THERE'S NOWHERE YOU CAN GO WITHOUT SMELLING IT. WHEN MARY WIPED THE OINTMENT OFF JESUS' FEET WITH HER HAIR, THEN WEREVER MARY WENT, THE FRAGRANCE WAS SURE TO GO. THE BLESSING GIVEN TO JESUS ENDED UP SHARED WITH OTHER PEOPLE. WHEREVER SHE WALKED, WHEN PEOPLE SAW MARY, THEY CAUGHT A FRAGRANCE AND THEY THOUGHT OF JESUS.

ALL THIS HAPPENED NOT LONG BEFORE JESUS' FINAL DAYS IN JERUSALEM. NEXT SUNDAY IS PALM SUNDAY. WE ARE COMING TO THE END OF JESUS' LIFE. IN THE VERY NEXT CHAPTER, THE HOUR WILL COME. SUCH A STRONG PERFUME WOULD HAVE LASTED A LONG TIME. EVERYWHERE JESUS WENT..AS HE RODE INTO JERUSALEM ON PALM SUNDAY, AS HE CLEANSED THE TEMPLE, AS HE GATHERED WITH HIS DISCIPLES IN AN UPPER ROOM, AS HE APPEARED BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST AND PILATE, I WONDER IF THE FRAGRANCE OF MARY'S PERFUME STILL LINGERED FAINTLY AS A REMINDER OF HER DEVOTION. AND THEN, PERHAPS, JUST PERHAPS, WHEN JESUS UTTERED HIS WORDS OF FORGIVENESS AND COMPLETION ON THE CROSS, HE MIGHT HAVE SENSED A FAINT, SWEET FRAGRANCE REMINDING HIM HE HAD BEEN GREATLY LOVED.

MARY HAD AN EXTRAVAGANT FAITH AND CALLS US TO DO THE SAME. EXTRAVAGANT FAITH IS ABOUT GIVING GOD ALL WE HAVE. WHEN WE ARE OVERWHELMED BY OUR LOVE FOR GOD, WE ARE APT TO DO WILD THINGS.

SO LET GO A BIT OF WHATEVER HOLDS YOU BACK FROM GIVING ALL THAT YOU HAVE, ALL THAT YOU ARE, FROM GOD. LET GOD'S LOVE WASH OVER YOU AND CARRY YOU TO SOMETHING NEW AND THEN PREPARE FOR THE OVERWHELMING FRAGRANCE THAT COMES WHEN YOU FULLY GIVE YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST. AMEN.

