



“Come Meet Jesus – Who Receives Our Gifts”

Fifth Sunday of Lent
Saturday & Sunday, April 6 – 7, 2019
All Services
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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

John 12:1-8

Imagine a time in your life when someone’s words made you doubt yourself. Did you ask yourself: Can I really do this? Am I good enough? Did I make the right decision? How did that make you feel? How did you respond - or want to respond?

I ask because while I was reading this week’s story from John, I wondered something. I began to wonder how Mary felt when she heard Judas speak. The author of John’s Gospel is straightforward and to the point. The author tells it like it is but leaves a lot to our imaginations. I began to wonder about how Mary felt when she heard those words from Judas because we aren’t told how Mary felt or how she responded. There’s no narrator telling us the details. Instead we are left to wonder so wonder I did.

Mary is in the middle of doing something profound, an act full of meaning. Professor of Preaching and Homiletics Karoline Lewis writes that Mary’s act is “an expression of profuse love.” This is an act of tremendous devotion and an act of service and discipleship. This is an act that tells us just how much Mary loves Jesus, just how important their relationship is to her.

The cost alone of this nard shows the importance. The oil she puts on Jesus’ feet is crazy expensive! It comes from a plant indigenous to India and cost a year’s worth of wages! A year’s worth of wages! Holy moly! Imagine doing that! Giving all that you made in a year in service to Jesus. Mary isn’t messing around; she probably thought hard about this decision. Mary is giving Jesus **everything** she has; she is giving Jesus **everything** that she is.

And then, Judas inserts himself into this moment: “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” Mary doesn’t hear what’s in the parentheses; she doesn’t know Judas’ motives.

I began to wonder how did those words make Mary feel? I imagine she stopped what she was doing; perhaps, she turned and looked at Judas. Maybe she was taken aback or surprised. I imagine a stream of negative thoughts started running through her mind. I imagine she started to doubt herself; I imagine her thinking, “What am I doing? Why did I spend all that money? Did I make the right call?”

After a few moments of silence, Jesus speaks, “Leave her alone.” Jesus affirms Mary; in fact, Jesus praises her for understanding what is coming. Jesus is going to the cross; he

will leave these friends of his. Mary is preparing Jesus for what is to come. We could even say Mary is encouraging Jesus, lifting him up for the difficult journey ahead. I hear in Jesus' words his love for Mary; he loves her for who she is, for all that God created her to be. In that moment, Jesus receives Mary's gift of love and devotion. Jesus responds with grace.

In the same way, Jesus loves us for who we are. Jesus loves us for all that we have been created to be. Jesus receives our gifts of love and devotion, of service and discipleship. Jesus responds to us with grace.

Now, think about a moment when words were used to affirm you like Jesus did for Mary. Has someone praised you? Has someone showed you love? Has someone acknowledged your gifts, your talents? Has someone encouraged you to be the person God made you to be?

We've all experienced moments when people used words to tear us down, but also used words to build us up. I've been thinking about words a lot lately. For the last few weeks in Lent as part of Trinity's Wednesday Connect program, I've been leading a group in conversations about words, about how we communicate with each other. The group has talked about words that have built us up, moments when words have encouraged us. We've talked about words that have torn us down, moments when words have hurt us. We've learned that God cares about how we use words and what words we use to communicate with others.

On the flipside, I also started thinking about how we also use words like Judas, how we hurt others as much as we have been hurt ourselves. Judas questioned Mary's act of love. Judas used words that could have torn Mary down. Judas acted as if he knew better, as if he cared about others.

How often do we act like Judas? How often do we make statements with hidden agendas? How often do our words hurt others? We've been on both sides. We've been in Mary's shoes, and we've probably been in Judas' as well.

I bring this thought up because I want us to be aware. I want us to think about why we say the things we do. Earlier this week, I heard about some negative words that were spoken, words that could easily hurt someone, make them doubt themselves and their work, words that expressed someone wasn't good enough. Those words were spoken in this church. And in response, I said: "Why can't we just all be nice? Why can't we try to build each other up?" Because we all know that though Trinity is a church, though Trinity is a community of Jesus' followers, we still have a hard time following Jesus! We still have a hard time speaking positive words that affirm, encourage, and uplift.

In our story for today, we hear Jesus use positive words. We hear Jesus encourage. We hear Jesus say, "Keep doing what you're doing!" We see Jesus receive Mary and her gifts.

How can we do that for others? We could say, "thank you." We could acknowledge someone's hard work in a team meeting. We could point out that someone has a

knack for something. We could acknowledge that they brought something to a project. Remember how that felt when someone did that for you? When someone lifted you up and encouraged you? How cool would it be to do that for someone else?

Because Jesus loves you for who you are. To Jesus, you are good enough! You are more than good enough! Jesus sees when you bring your all to what you do. Jesus receives your gifts. Now, we can do that for each other because Jesus does it for us!

Amen.

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