

## ‘Love That Will Not Let Go’

Texts: Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:4-14 (Series C 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent) Ps126

John 12:1-8

Prayer:

We are nearing the end of our journey through Lent but much awaits us in the approach to Easter. This is the last Sunday in Lent, and to recap this Lenten journey this is what we have been dealing with: *Dust to dust, Did God really Say?, Rejected Love, the Great Invitation, and Come, Dinner is Ready*, and today we complete the Lenten journey with God's *Love that will Not Let Go*.

Lazarus had fallen seriously ill, and his life was in danger. His sisters immediately sent for Jesus but by the time he arrived, Lazarus had died. The sisters were upset. If only Jesus had been here Lazarus would still be alive, they bemoaned. Jesus went to the grave and asked that the stone be taken away from the entrance to the tomb.

He called out in a loud voice, "**Lazarus, come out!**" And out he came. Where there had been *weeping* there was now *laughing*, the sounds of joy and excitement. Lazarus was alive! Once again, Jesus had turned a funeral into a celebration.

Next, we hear of Jesus having dinner with Lazarus. Martha is busy in the kitchen as she always was. Jesus and Lazarus are at the table. Mary came into the room where the men were eating, carrying with her a bottle of the most attractive and costliest perfume. (Aromatic oil made from a plant in India.

This was pure and unmixed so was very expensive. People would buy this as an investment. We are told that Mary's flask of perfume cost about a year's wages for a labourer in Jesus' days).

Mary did something remarkable. She assumed the position of a servant (*servants washed the feet of visitors*) and poured the perfume on to Jesus' feet. And then with her long beautiful hair she proceeded to wipe Jesus' feet.

We are told the whole house was filled with the beautiful aroma.

- What was Mary thinking?
- What made her pour her life's savings on someone's feet?
- What made her use such expensive perfume, when something cheaper would have been just as effective?

Simply put – what Mary did was an act of devotion an act of love. It was a gift from her heart. She wanted to give the best she had, and the best she had was a flask of pure perfume, her life saving. Jesus was someone very special, she loved him dearly, and she wanted to show it, so she gave him the best.

That's what happens when people love. When a husband loves his wife, he wants to give her the best and vice versa. When parents love a child, they want to give that child the best.

Last week we heard about God's never-ending love for us when we heard Jesus' story of the man and his two sons. Even though he was terribly disappointed in his two sons – one had cashed in his share of inheritance and wasted it all on loose living and the other couldn't see why his father was so generous and lavish with his love when the younger brother came home.

This is a story about how devoted God is toward us; how ex-trav-a-gant his love is; how lavish he is with his forgiveness and grace. He loves us even though we rightfully deserve nothing from God at all. And today we hear of Mary who realizes how much love Jesus has shown to her, to Lazarus, and to Martha.

She demonstrates in a practical way how much she is devoted to him. She gives boldly of the best that she had, just as Jesus will give himself boldly in his devotion for us when he is raised on a cross on Calvary.

There will always be those who will callout "*wasteful*", "*irresponsible*", "*reckless*", "*foolish*" and "*rash*" when they see others being far more generous than they are prepared to be. (Example the reaction on Mel Gibson's film: ***The Passion of the Christ***). We do that when we question the motives of someone who donates generously to the church or gives many hours of his/her time to some cause.

In Jesus' story of the Prodigal son, the older brother thought his father was overgenerous and foolish when he showed his love and forgiveness to the younger son who didn't deserve such kind reception. And today we have Judas complaining that Mary has been *irresponsible* in the way she *wasted* this perfume.

She could have sold it for a lot of money which could have been given to the poor. By worldly standards, Mary was *foolish* and *irresponsible* but Jesus could only see in her love, and devotion.

We are now just one week away from *Holy Week* which starts next Sunday with Palm Sunday, the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. This text has a special message for us as we draw near the end of the Lenten season.

**Firstly**, *it reminds us what true devotion is.* As Mary knelt at Jesus' feet in the posture of a true *servant*, we are reminded of what happened at the— *Passover* meal — when Jesus was eating his last meal with his disciples.

Out of true love and devotion to his disciples he knelt before them with a bowl of water and towel and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. Jesus came into the world to be our servant, to serve us because of his overgenerous love for us.

**Secondly**, *we are reminded that Jesus did not hold back his love for us.* Just as Mary gave of the best of what she had, even more so Jesus gave the best of what he had to offer — his life. Out of his complete and total love for us, he gave up everything so that we could be certain of life.

**Thirdly**, *we are led to ask ourselves, how ex-trav-a-gant has our devotion been to our God?* Like Mary we should be satisfied with nothing but the best when we come here to *worship* — the way we *listen* to God's Word as it is read and spoken, the way we participate in the service — reading, playing music, singing, ushering, welcoming visitors, the way we pray and respond to God's Word with joy and lives full of devotion, and excitement about our faith.

Missionary work in Ghana, started on December 18, 1828 by Basel Missionaries (the Presbyterian Church) The first four missionaries died within three years of their arrival. To the natural mind..... Oh!! What a waste of life.

Oh!! What a waste of resources some might say, but to the spiritual eyes the seed of the Gospel has been sown by their devotion and love. And you know what? Many, more missionaries followed there after and emulated their sacrificial love for Jesus' Kingdom. Today, I proudly boast as a recipient of this devotion and sacrifice these men and women made to bring the Gospel of Salvation to Ghana.

God's love for us calls for unselfishness in all areas of life, an unselfishness like Mary's – unselfishness as we serve others who are facing hard times, the sick, the sad, in fact, anyone who needs our love. Judas was concerned that Mary had been reckless in her demonstration of her devotion to Jesus, but Jesus commended her.

She gave unselfishly and likewise we are challenged to give of our resource, our time and ourselves generously as a way of expressing our thanks, our love and our commitment to our Lord and Saviour. Are we willing to extend ourselves by giving the best of what we have?

**Finally:** This anointing is to us, Jesus was clear that Mary's act of love meant more than mere hospitality; it was a foreshadowing of his soon to come death and burial. The ritual of burial involved precious spices and oils and the anointing of the body always began with the feet.

*Ex-trav-a-gant* love like that of Mary, is the kind of love to which we are called. Indeed, it is the kind of love that Jesus himself showed us, when he, on the day after Mary anointed his feet and dried them with her hair, rode in Jerusalem and gave himself up to death.

Let pay close attention for God is *about to do a new thing*. Paul reminds us that we are to forget the old ways as things are being made new, and tells us directly that we must look and move – *straining forward* as – *to what lies ahead*. We are given a *way* and a *path* with our faith that guides us to the eternal life we are promised if we keep our eyes on the *prize* Easter and beyond. **Amen.**

**Prayer concerns:** *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Euclide & Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Karen Abazio, Pastor Timothy, the dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid - 19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, Note: of thanks to God as the Covid-19 virus is easing off and more restrictions are being lifted, and finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

**Prayer:** Almighty and Eternal God, release us from the false piety of righteousness, and pride in mere earthly achievement. Awaken us to the freedom of knowing and living each day in Christ, and the power of His Resurrection. We ask through Jesus, our Anointed Christ; and the Holy Spirit, Your Fragrant Breath; who together with You are One God, forever and ever.  
**Amen.**

**Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:**

- **Come Down, O Love Divine # 3323**
- **I Want to Walk with Me # 325**
- **How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds #620**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

*Riley Tae*

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

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