

“WHEN LOVE IS WASTEFUL”

John 12: 1-8

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

Each day we make several choices. Certainly, we can all relate to the many decisions we are called to make every single day. This could range from routine decisions to get out of bed, what to wear, what to eat for breakfast, to how we react to situations which come upon us without warning. You may want to think about a time when you needed to make an ‘on the spot’ decision which had implications in terms of our time and resources. What would you do first? Hopefully you would pray to God for guidance!

Jesus had huge credibility. In our scripture reading from John 12, Jesus is in the home of Lazarus whom he raised from the dead. Remember, Lazarus was not just freshly dead when he was resurrected, but he was already dead for three days before Jesus raised him! Through this healing Jesus became quite famous. The crowds were so impressed with Jesus and the miracles he performed that the religious leaders of the time wanted Jesus and Lazarus killed. When Jesus’ popularity rose, the religious elite felt their position of authority was being threatened.

Jesus also gained a following from those who personally experienced Jesus kindness and love. One of those people was Mary. Through Jesus’ miracles and the display of his gracious love to the weak and vulnerable, people were increasingly choosing Jesus as their spiritual leader.

Mary’s gift was extravagant! I am sure Jesus was surprised by Mary’s wonderful outpouring of love. The value of the perfume was 300 denarii (at that time, one denarii was considered the typical daily wage of a labourer). She did what she did out of love and appreciation for what Jesus have done in raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. In Mary’s heart, Jesus was worth far more than 300 denarii. Jesus and everyone in the room knew Mary’s gift was a totally extravagant gesture! Mary’s steadfast devotion to Jesus was in stark contrast to Judas’ total lack of devotion.

The perfume poured over Jesus feet was the type commonly used in various applications including preparing a body for burial. I am not sure if Mary had this mind, but the gift brought great comfort to Jesus who knew that soon he would suffer and die. Jesus experienced a great act of love through Mary’s sacrifice!

The gift brought a beautiful fragrance. In John 12: 3, we read: *“The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”* Research on the five senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch) has concluded that the sense of smell is the most precise and most powerful of all senses. Smell also triggers memory more than other senses. We can all state a time when we smelled something, and a memory was triggered. Smell is powerful and I think John mentions it to emphasize the great

significance of Mary's self-sacrificing gift to Jesus. The apostle Paul calls Jesus' followers as 'the aroma of Christ' (2 Corinthians 2: 15) – that is a powerful identity. The question is: How can we live our lives to bring life-giving fragrance to others? The answer is through expressing great love which involves sacrifice of oneself and one's material resources. As followers of Christ, expressing great love and sacrifice should be our priority in making decisions of how we are to live!

Judas mentality! Judas was strong in his opposition to what was happening. (verse 5). He tried to appeal to logic about how the amount of money the perfume represented could be used to help so many poor people. Judas was saying in effect that what Mary had done was a great waste! The problem is that Judas did not really care for the poor and Jesus knew Judas's heart. The greed had taken him over (verse 6). *(When Jesus said, "The poor will always be with you, he did not mean that it's of little positive consequence to help those who are poor and vulnerable, – NO! What Jesus is saying here is that the poor are always a priority – always. From time to time, however, an emergent need deserves an even greater priority at that moment and we are to respond with great love and sacrifice. This does not mean we stop giving to the poor!)*

Judas did not see the great love and sacrifice Mary had for Jesus. His eyes were blinded by greed. Most of us have experienced a time when someone has put themselves aside, has sacrificed their time and resources, to say through this kindness that you mattered. These great acts of kindness we never forget, and are more compelled to do the same for others in need.

In our society, we are constantly being encouraged to be greedy. Marketing is aimed at making us feel less secure if we do not have the latest thing like clothing, cell phone, food, you name it. It is important that we are aware of our consumerist culture and not allow ourselves to be manipulated by this Judas mentality! This way of thinking makes us less kind, cynical and stingy in sharing our God-given resources for his kingdom. With a Judas mentality we become focused on ourselves, and do not see opportunities for great love when it is staring us in the face. We can also be hesitant to give of our time, talent and money to the needs of the church's ministry, because our thinking is not in line with Jesus. If we think like Judas did, any kind of generous giving will seem wasteful.

Being a wasteful giver: Jesus affirms Mary's action. In light of this, it is important to ask ourselves how we can be more 'wasteful' in our generosity. Jesus would want us to make it a priority to be generous. Certainly, it does take time to say hello to a stranger and sit and talk for a while. Our ministry at men's mission gives us opportunity to do so on a monthly basis. Taking the time to make a visit to a friend, who is sick or lonely, can make a big difference in that person's day – and your day! Let your generous actions emit an inspiring aroma. Pray and give thanks for the Lord's great love and sacrifice for you and for the world! Amen.