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John 12:1-8

Setting the Scene

Life had been a surreal drama. Mary and Martha had been devastated by the death of their brother Lazarus. They were in shock for a while. Neither of them had been prepared for it. The stench of his body still hung in the air. That's not something you can get out of your home – or out of your head – quickly.

Jesus came waltzing in, four days later. (*John 11:17*) He resuscitated Lazarus – breathed life back into those lungs. Bizarre and marvelous all together.

Even if you weren't a fervent disciple, it made you wonder at Jesus. Raising one man from the dead? Sure, it's not exactly what the scriptures said. But could he be the messiah, the one they had been waiting for? Word spread of Jesus' miracle. People came from far away to see the dead man whom Jesus returned to life. It was hard not to believe, after something that powerful.

What do you do to thank someone after this? Martha and Mary knew that whatever they did, it would never be enough. No mere gift can compare with receiving more time with their brother. After brainstorming and rejecting lots of ideas, they finally decided: At least they could share a good meal with him, to

express their family's gratitude. Mary and Martha and Lazarus were there. Jesus came, as their guest of honor, along with a few of his closest disciples.

Lavish Worship

What Mary did that night was almost embarrassing – over the top in all sorts of ways. People did use oil on their feet. They all walked through a dusty world, and many of them wearing sandals. It was common to enter a house, wash your own feet, and put oil on them. In rich homes, a servant might help guests.

This was no rich home though. Martha, not a slave, prepared the meal and served it. And Mary, not a servant, tended to Jesus' feet. That night, she did not use the normal oil. It was nard – perfume, and expensive perfume, at that! Mary poured nard that would normally have lasted months onto Jesus' feet. You could smell the honor and gratitude, Fragrance that redeemed the stink of death which lingered in the air. Mary unwrapped her hair, an undignified thing for a woman to do in front of guests. You could see her love for Jesus with each motion, as she wiped his feet with her hair.

The meal – that was something nice to do for a kind friend.

Mary's anointing – that was pure adoration and worship.

Various Disciples

Our scriptures refer to the men who were the twelve disciples all the time. They were called by Jesus. Traveled with him and learned from him. The twelve were sent out to share the good news in word and deed. At times, it even seemed like they knew who he was. These twelve men were close to Jesus – in the center of all the action.

But none of them professed their faith like Mary did. She does not say a word in our story. So many of life's important things have little to do with words. People can say the word love, but it may be clear from what they do that the word is empty. The disciple Peter said that Jesus was the messiah, and then tried to stand in the way of the events that Jesus predicted.

Like the others, Judas was obviously confused. He protested Mary's act. "Why was this perfume not sold for 300 denarii and the money given to the poor?" *(John 12:5)* Jesus seemed to care about the poor so much – maybe Judas was shocked by the lavishness. Maybe he was worried about the waste of a ministry opportunity. Maybe the writer is correct, and Judas selfishly wished he could steal the money from the common purse. As Christians, we can be side-tracked by so many things. We may debate about all sorts of questions – which are in theory worthy of our

time. But we miss the forest for the trees. We may say that we are following Jesus, but our actions speak the truth. We are worshiping money, or popularity, or control.

Often they are more comfortable for us than pouring ourselves into our call: To love the Lord with all our hearts, and our souls, and our minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. God has claimed us to live lives that are drenched in praise and grace. Lives that don't just go to worship on Sunday mornings. That worship with every moment of every day:

Giving thanks from our first breath of the day;

Seeking God for guidance, in the word and in prayer;

Giving generously to others.

Wrestling with temptation and confessing our failings;

Thoughtfully sharing our gifts wherever we are. Worshiping with what we say and what we do.

She was pure and focused. With an inherent sense of dignity, despite her undignified hair. With a willingness to be humble and get her hands dirty.

Mary “got” it as few other people did. She anointed Jesus, almost as a king – Just a few verses before scriptures describe how crowds waved palms and proclaimed him, “King of Israel!” (*John 12:13*) Mary anointed Jesus’ feet, almost like a

dead man being prepared for burial. In her anointing, she prophesied about all that was to come: celebration and betrayal, death and life.