

LENT 5

YEAR C

ISAIAH 43:16-21

PHILIPPIANS 3:4b-14

JOHN 12:1-8

APRIL 6, 7, 2019

How do we measure how much a person loves another? How is love described and how do we know how much one loves another. We throw the words around quite easily. Many of us say we love this or that but can we really love our car, boat, house or another beer? We also say "I love you" lots of times. Husbands and wives say these words before parting for the day and before going to sleep at night. They might say those words at other times during the day. We say it to our children. We tell them that we love them even when we are offering discipline. It is important to say the words but it is even more important for us to share that love in other ways. We need to share and show our love in the things we do and in the gifts we give. It is important to say the words but much more important to mean what we say when we say, "I love you."

**John 12:2, 3** There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Jesus was entering his last days before betrayal and crucifixion. In the verses previous to our Gospel lesson today we have the story of the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus had been in the grave four days but Jesus brought him back to life. In our reading today Jesus returned to Bethany, the village near Jerusalem where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. Jesus went there for dinner. Perhaps they gathered in honor of Lazarus being raised from the dead. As they gathered Mary demonstrated her love for Jesus. She took the most expensive thing she had and ministered to Jesus. Mary had a jar of ointment worth nearly a year's wage. She poured the ointment on the feet of Jesus and wiped it with her hair. Mary loved her Lord and did not care who knew it. She wanted to share this gift with Jesus and no one would stop her.

How do we share our love for each other? We have the example of Mary, Martha and Lazarus as they shared food together. We also have the example of Jesus and his love for this family but also for all people. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that God gave Jesus. We see love as through the physical touch of Mary on the feet of Jesus. She poured the ointment on his feet, massaged them and then dried his feet with her hair. This touch was not suspicious except to those whose minds work that way. It was her way of loving Jesus.

**John 12:4-6** But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup>(He said this not because he cared

**about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)**

There is always someone around that will try to destroy a loving act of kindness. They will take what is good and seek to destroy it or describe it away as if the person doing the good work is up to something. Mary did this act of kindness because she loved her Lord. She loved her Lord so deeply that she wanted to share what was most precious to her. In this case it was the vial of expensive ointment. Mary loved her Lord on many levels. Since she let her hair down in public we know she had an intimacy with Jesus reserved for a wife for her husband. A woman in that society only let her down in the presence of her husband but Mary let her hair down to wipe the feet of Jesus.

Judas spoke up about the waste but he may have been saying what others were thinking. This ointment could have been used for more practical things like meeting the budget or paying out benevolence. Judas complained that this could have been given to the poor. In his mind and in his words, this woman is doing something completely wrong. Mary would not be deterred. She did not care about what others were saying. She did not care who saw how much she loved her Lord.

Mary loved Jesus as a student loves her teacher. We know from other readings that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus listening to every word while her sister Martha worked in the kitchen preparing a meal. Mary listened to Jesus and learned the necessary things disciples learn in order to serve the Lord. There is a certain respect students have for their teachers and teachers have for their students. There was this kind of love and respect between Mary and Jesus. It could be that Judas and the Twelve did not yet have this kind of love and respect. They were still concerned about image and about what others might say. They could not quite get past the way things had always been to the way things need to be. Mary knew the ways of our Lord even the Twelve did not.

How much did Mary love Jesus? She loved him enough to risk ridicule or worse to share and show her love for Jesus. Jesus called this a beautiful act of love and devotion. It is not just that the ointment was expensive but that Mary loved her Lord so much. We often think that the more expensive the gift, the greater the love. This is not necessarily true. Sometimes the more expensive gifts are a substitute for truly showing love. The true acts of love are those that come from the heart. They are acts of love done just because.

At Christmas we tend to spend more as a substitute for sharing love. I know this is not always the case but we think that the more expensive the gift the more we love. The same is true of Valentine's Day and birthdays. Advertisements even tell us to say "I love you with the perfect gift." The perfect gift they talk about might be the perfect diamond or the perfect set of dishes or something else that costs lots of money. It might be that these things might say, "I love you" but things can never be a substitute for truly loving.

**John 12:7, 8** Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

The Lord knew that Mary was demonstrating her love for him. He also knew that she was doing nothing inappropriate or out of line. He told the others to leave her alone because she is doing a loving thing. She did something none of the others thought to do. She was saying, “I love you” through her actions and not so much with words.

Jesus did not tell them to stop caring for the poor. He does not stop expecting us to minister to those in need but we do need to have the proper priority. Jesus says that we will always have poor people around us. The Lord must always come first. We must first sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. We must know how to love before we can try to minister to God’s people. Mary loved her Lord and she bore witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ through this act of love. We are to minister to those in need but we have fellowship with the Lord first. We show love for God by the things we say and by the things we do. AMEN