

March 14, 2010 (Joint Worship Service)

John 12:1-8

Mary's Secret

This coming Wednesday is my nephew Daniel's birthday, and I have a problem. I have the same problem for the birthdays of everyone in my family.

I always wish I could buy some wonderful, extravagant present that is the Best Birthday Present EVER. Daniel loves trains, and I would really like to buy him one big enough to ride on, that he could set up around the outside of his house, and be a real engineer. For my other relatives, I always wish I could get them something outrageous, too, like a big-screen tv, or a new car, or a trip around the world. Or maybe tuition for college. But I can't. I simply don't have the money.

But if I were rich, I would get them all those extravagant things. Because even though we say that “it’s the thought that counts,” and there’s truth in that, when you love someone, you want to go all out! People used to say that you would give the moon or a rainbow or something else impossible to the one you love. Because when you love someone, you would do anything for them.

In our passage from the gospel according to John this morning, we see exactly that. Mary anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume--- so expensive it cost about a year’s salary!

Judas Iscariot complains. They could have fed the hungry a lot of food for the money that perfume cost! What a waste! John writes that Judas was just worried about lining his own pockets, but really, he had a point. Wasn’t feeding the poor more important than buying perfume and then putting it on someone’s feet, even if we are talking about the feet of Jesus Christ??

But Mary knew a secret that Judas did not.

That secret was that when you love someone, you want to give them something extravagant! Nothing is too good, too expensive.

Nothing is a waste when it expresses your love to the one you love with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

These days, we all have to live on a budget. We can't go out buying anything that costs a whole year's income! We just can't! Or maybe we can-----

When Mary bought that perfume, she wasn't thinking about her budget. She must have had money saved up, so it wasn't that she was going into debt to do this. But she wasn't holding back anything, either.

Not her savings. And not her devotion and love.

Not long before this anointing, Jesus had raised Mary's brother, Lazarus, from the dead. Having been given back their brother, Martha and Mary showed their gratitude. Martha showed her gratitude by having a party in honor of Jesus, serving the guests. Mary, though, preferred to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him, and her way of showing her love and gratitude was more emotional, more physical.

Imagine how you would feel if Jesus had just given you back your brother---brought him out of the grave alive! Imagine the overwhelming feelings that you would have to have someone you love alive again! You would be overwhelmed by grace and filled with gratitude!

What would you do with those emotions? Would you just say thanks a lot and shake hands?

I don't think so.

And neither did Mary. Instead she went out and bought the best perfume that money could buy and then extravagantly used it to anoint the feet of Jesus---not his head, which would have been more dignified for her---but his feet!

Only the lowliest servants touched another person's feet. Mary was demonstrating two things----that she looked upon him as a slave looks at a master and that she loved him enough to give all of herself, all she had and all she was, to him.

We also are grateful to Christ. After all, he has not only saved the lives of those we love, but also our own lives. Without Christ, we would still be living in our sins, unforgiven, without hope of everlasting life.

Why are we not falling at his feet?

Why do we hold back our emotions, our gratitude, our love?

Mary's secret was that she knew she didn't have to hold back. What people thought of her didn't matter. Only her great love for her savior mattered.

For her to let her hair down in the presence of a man was considered shameful and brazen. Only "women of ill-repute" let their hair down in front of men.

And in mainline denominations people who let their emotions take over are looked down on, not as people of ill-repute, but as being too easily caught up in emotion. We pride ourselves on being people of reason, not emotion. We don't raise our hands in the air, we don't scream and shout, we don't get carried away by our feelings that way.

We have a reputation, you know, we United Methodists do, for being too controlled, too quiet, too

Boring!

Maybe it's time we learned Mary's secret. Maybe it's time we learned that loving Jesus with our whole heart and soul is going to carry with it some emotion, some extravagant actions, some kind of public display.

If we love Jesus Christ as much as we say we do, sometimes we will be overwhelmed and need to act on that love---act OUT that love!

How will we do that? How will we put our reputations on the line and show our love? I can't answer that for you, but I will tell you how I answer it for myself----by sharing with others how Jesus has changed my life, by sharing what I have with the poor and the needy, and by not being afraid to love Jesus and spend time with him.

I am in the process of learning Mary's secret, of learning how to be extravagant and expressive with my love for Jesus. Come, let us learn how to be bold and daring and over the top together with our love for the one who loved us first!-----oh, how I love Jesus, because he first loved me!

Amen!

