

The Way Is Before Us...Let Us Begin

Again:

*“Risk and Revelation: Extravagant
Generosity”*

Isaiah 43:16-21; John 12:1-8; The Gospel
of Mary 4:1, 3a; 5:8; 10:11b-12
March 31, 2019...Fifth Week of Lent

After Isaiah and before John:

God is about to do a new thing...do we
perceive it?
Will we allow ourselves anything new?
A do-over?

And in John...here's the scene:

Jesus' dear friends were giving a dinner
for him
with invited guests as well as the
usual entourage.

He sat at table with a dead
guy...Lazarus, whom he had raised
because of Martha and Mary's sure
belief.

(Have you ever sat at table with a once
dead inside guy?)

Martha was being Martha. Dinner was
served.
And Mary was nowhere to be found until
she appeared

and took her most costly perfume, one
used for anointing and honoring those
who die.

Mary pours it out on Jesus' feet. Can
you not smell it?
Can you imagine the dismay?

A woman touching a man...and Jesus
none the less!

A woman making a decision on
her own to use
a valuable resource in such a
way!

Judas,
hiding his true motivation behind
feigned good intentions, challenges
Mary's actions using the poor as his
cover.

Was he upset because of the cost, or
because of the poor, because she crossed
the usual boundaries of acceptance?
Jesus says...leave her alone!
Oh...that someone would say that on *my
behalf* when I do a gutsy thing that is not
well received! Leave her alone.

He asserts: She is aware of a reality
which seems to evade you all *no matter
how often* I have tried to share it with
you.

He lets the tension hang in the air.
He resists rescuing the moment or the
disciples...

And He allows himself to receive her
care.

What do you allow?
Listen...

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Mary:

Not a timeline of Jesus ministry but a
sharing of His pearls of wisdom to
Mary...mostly shared as the Risen Christ
after appearing to her in the garden.

Embrace the fullness of our humanity (and we have a nature of goodness/Godness)...it is the way through. Sin is an illusion...a betrayal of self in which we deceive ourselves and it's killing us. Be restored to your root. Our minds are powerful and how we think determines our vision.

Today we see how wonderfully able we are all made.

We are invited to allow ourselves to put that on instead of how we usually dress ourselves for the day! It's not as hard as we might think...to be capable...for the only rules and laws we need follow are from Jesus the living word.

Who allows you and me to live our true humane nature and so have the chance to become truly divine.

“Extravagant Generosity”

We travel to Jerusalem. Jerusalem...a place of confrontation with authorities...inner and outer authorities in our lives.

The path...

It will be risky. Ah...there will be revelations.

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Mary touches something in Jesus...besides his feet! She touches his heart and the core of his being. Touches with the depth of her understanding and boldness of her commitment.

She was totally present in the moment.

She only saw his need.

One extravagant, generous moment!

A new moment in her...to step forward so bravely.

A new thing God is doing!

Has anyone ever been so present to you that it seemed as if they poured out their devotion over you?

Been so present to you that they saw you...your true nature to its root. And reached out to you?

Did you allow that generosity of their care? Or turn from it, minimize it?

What did it feel like to have someone see you and pour out care over you?

Could a pouring out of such presence and care ever be wasteful? Can you *ever* love *too* much?

Mindful that in love there is no rescuing but rather a deep presence that accepts what is and begins there!

Extravagant presence, love, grace...
in this story, it smells like perfume.

Our story finds Mary and Martha and Lazarus with Jesus once again. In joy and celebration they dine –

in stark contrast to the sorrow and loss they had experienced in their lives prior to this particular evening's events.

Jesus earlier turned their sorrow into great joy as he raised Lazarus from the dead.

Their joy stays with them. ***Stay with the joy!***
Stay the path!

Don't become dead...inside as life challenges.

The stories of the Bible are full of sorrow and loss,
and the hope that God is doing a new thing in our lives
and in the world.

Emotional stories. Our story today is emotional and makes an appeal to our senses --
both literally and figuratively.

I invite you to let yourself be filled with the subtle fragrances of our gospel lesson.

Against the backdrop of aromas of a wonderful meal...perhaps that's aroma of roasted lamb lofting in the air...

Mary broke open a bottle of very expensive perfume equal in cost to a year's wages for a laborer...

real love never comes cheap!

And she anoints Jesus' feet and "the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

More than perfume, it was the fragrance of devotion and trust...love in motion.

Love truly seeing the thing most needed.

Mary truly sees Jesus.

Oh that we could deeply see each other and fill this sanctuary with such a fragrance today!

We can...pour ourselves out! Stay the path.

But that day, not all who were there were able to smell the fragrance—
perceive the newness,
the quieting rejoicing and devotion that filled that room.

Some there experienced, instead, a stench -- the smell of devotion a stench in their nostrils.

That is, they were threatened by the sweet emotions,
not trusting in Jesus' words or new possibilities. Couldn't wrap their heads around a
different kind of life and world.
They wouldn't allow it!

They held suspect the possibility that the world could ever be different. Judas was one of those.

So were the empire-makers and some religious authorities who were out to stop Jesus...**and YOU for perceiving something new...and holy possible!**

...And I wonder if, in last's week's story of the prodigal brothers, joy was a stench in the elder brother's nostrils when he first smelled the fatted calf on the grill at the welcome-home party for his younger brother.

Devotion and Joy a stench because he did not trust in graced do-overs. He only believed in hard work, even if it spun him out of control and emptied him, ...he perceived anything new as a threat.

And in today's reading,
Mary's extravagant, breath-taking gesture of anointing Jesus' feet draws gasps from those present,
for she went beyond the greeting of a friend or patron.

She acted a devotee to the truth and power of His life...beginning to see His death as a witness to the unstoppable power of love's non-violence.

Imagine how Jesus must have felt about receiving her gift.

Imagine the meaning to Jesus as he approaches the hostile authorities in Jerusalem where he must deal with the angry members of his own group and Pilot.

Imagine how it might be for you to be anointed...seen, honored as you ready for your day...

knowing what lay ahead of you as you head off to work or stay home to do your tasks tomorrow.

Imagine what it must mean to God today when we make extravagant, audacious, generous gestures of love in the face of judgment and hostility

– our offering "rivers in the desert",
"a way in the wilderness". Staying the path.

Love: love cannot wait...and cannot be wasted.
There can never be too much!

Imagine being extravagant with your love...
enough so to begin something new within yourself...
within one of your relationships?

How would you like to be extravagant and with whom?

And imagine how Jesus might have felt about Judas' reaction.

Judas deceives his colleagues by feigning concern for the poor in order to get money for himself. In order to avoid the thing at hand...

deflect away from his own neediness or weakness.

(Or so the story is told here...more on that during Holy Week!)

We know Judas...in ourselves, in others.

Yes. The poor are always with us,
but not because of any quality of the poor.

They remain with us because we of power...yes, we...continue to live our lives providing an occasional fish instead of a fishing pole.

Governments and policies and even some well-intended churches often do harm to the poor...

judging them, saying pull yourself up, just work harder.

Forgetting the matrix/reality from which they come and in which they live!

We distort, oppress and destroy that which is uncomfortable, that which we do not want to see

as if we have to have it all figured out just to be present to it...so we look away.

Sorry we do. We allow this!

This statement Jesus makes is a political statement as well as a religious one. Such statements will get him killed.

Biblical:

“I command you, you shall open wide your hand to the needy and to the poor in the land.” (Deuteronomy 15:11)

“Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.”

The only law for Jesus...as Levi references in the gospel of Mary: Love the Lord your God with all your mind, soul, and heart and your neighbor as yourself.

So often we are only willing to throw resources of the value of a bottle of nard at the symptom,

not advocating for justice around the real problem!

How often we appeal to some high-sounding cause/principle in order to avoid action or accountability! You know...

Well, the government should...

If the schools were...

If it weren't for this or that...

This church shouldn't...

That church should...

There is a Judas in each one of us! And Jesus loves Judas, too! That's why he speaks truth to him...to you!

Jesus steps right up and says, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial."

And Mary...Mary must have begun to sense and accept Jesus' movement toward the cross and it's meaning for Him.

Something in her had begun to shift toward belief...understanding that the newness God offers

cannot easily be killed,
that it rises again in the face of great odds...

an Easter awareness.

An awareness, a witness to the non-violent power of love-filled resistance to what is
unjust and violent...
a resistance which...takes one beyond Jerusalem!

Indeed, along the way, there will be sorrow and loss.

And offered is the revelation that in risking being present to that sorrow and loss and
struggle...

we take a real step toward our full humanity within God's extravagant, generous grace
of new beginnings.

If we'll allow it!

Sorrow and loss -- the sorrow and loss in each of our lives does not have to bring us to a
state of hopelessness.

God knows it's hard to be a human being.

Jesus goes ahead of us changing all the possibilities;
bringing hope, peace into the realities of our lives

through his modeling for us how to live with integrity...
not through empire, or war and victory,
but through justice for all and non-violent responses
in all of our lives, our life together.

His actions one with His faith...

He lives integrity in His relationship with God and with others midst sorrow and loss,
and finds...exquisite peace.

Jesus shows us how to stay the path.

The newness Jesus offers is not easily killed,
except through our own refusal to perceive what "springs forth"...or through our
stinginess.

Here it is...the wisdom teaching for us today:

Consider the moments in your life when you risked costly consequences to express
deep affection and care for someone who needed it right then...in the moment...
whether a family member, church-goer, fellow worker.

A moment when you risked the consequences to care...

Perhaps it was the opportunity
to tear down a sturdily built wall,

Or walk through a suddenly opened door,

Or give honor where there had been disappointment,

Or grasp a hand that had long since been let go.

Or to say, this is not alright with me!

It is Lent --

Smell the nard -- literally and figuratively.
Stay the path and breathe it in!

Let the sweet smell of newness and devotion fill your senses. Risk allowing yourself an extravagant moment of grace!

Know that you are not alone in taking the risk while traveling the path; we are with you.

**Know that pessimism and sorrow are at best
emotional half-holidays.**

**Presence and Devotion
bring energy for facing the day,**

a new possibility.

"Do not remember former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth,
do you not perceive it? (Will you allow it?)

I will make a way in the wilderness (of your life)
and rivers in the desert
(of seemingly overwhelming realities)."

So, what are you willing to risk? What will you allow?

Mary made Jesus her personal responsibility.

Others, even the disciples, kept a respectful distance.

She got involved. She made him hers.
She stepped up! Stayed the path.

Make him yours! Make him yours by being generous with the resources you are borrowing from the universe.

Be bold in the moment...live extravagantly in the moment doing what you can with the one who is at hand.

Find the people and issues and spaces in your life that are so valuable to you that you would freely risk all you have for them.

You do it as you let go of former things,
stop considering things of old,
and join with God in doing a new thing in your life ...doing...a new thing!

Boldly stand where no self-absorbed human has stood before...get in step with God.
Stay the path.

**~Because much has been revealed, you can risk.
~Because you risk, much is revealed!
The Way through...**

And the way through:

The first step, first revelation will be...self-awareness!

And the second, courageous living from the heart!

And the third, second chances...actualized grace!

The fourth is self-acceptance...starting right where we are!

The fifth is allowing yourself to be extravagantly generous with who you are!

Stay the path, don't just travel to your own Jerusalem but through your Jerusalem to renewed life.

This is the opportune time.