

"Time After Time"

"It's Time For Extravagant Generosity...Grace!"

Isaiah 43: 16-21; John 12: 1-8; Sirach 4:20,
Romans 13:11, 2 Corinthians 6:2
March 13, 2016 Fourth Sunday of Lent

After Isaiah and before John:

So...here's the scene:

His dear friends were giving a dinner for him...I assume 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.

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 out of role!

A woman touching a man, so sensually...and Jesus none the less! A woman making a decision 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, 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.

And I allow myself to receive her care.

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#### What time is it? It's time for....

Time's been good to me  
Running out of time  
Timing  
Time for a change  
Time for a break  
What time do you have Do you have time  
The present time  
Timing is everything  
I'm timing you  
Wrap around time  
Time for a good time  
Tummy time  
Time for a change  
Time is up  
Time is going by  
Time is going slowly  
Time is going quickly  
Now is not the time  
Make time  
Spend time with me  
All the time  
None of the time  
For a long time  
Another time  
A second time  
Time of need  
Just in time  
Time is running  
Time after time, all times,  
every time an acceptable, opportune time...

#### In today's wisdom teachings...

**Mary stops time...touches something in Jesus**  
....besides his feet!

She touches *his heart* and the *core* of his being  
with the depth of her understanding  
and boldness of her commitment.

Mary knew it was time...time indeed! She knew....

You can never have too much love, too much grace!  
You can never know in what timing a "new thing" will finally become apparent!  
What is the fragrance of devoted love and understanding?  
What does it feel like to have someone pour it out all over you?

Could a pouring out of devotion ever be wasteful?  
Could you ever love too much?

What is the fragrance of extravagant grace? Is it not the aroma of one's heart...your heart's truest intentions?

Our story finds Jesus with Mary, Martha and Lazarus...in-joying a dinner together - in stark contrast to the sorrow and loss they had experienced in their lives recently.

*Like them...**Stay with the joy!***

The stories of the Bible are full of sorrow and loss, and the hope that God is doing a new thing *and just in time!*

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 our gospel lesson..... *Against* the backdrop of the aromas of a wonderful meal, 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 an all knowing, devoted and courageous love. Oh that we could fill this sanctuary with such a fragrance today! (We are!)*

Smell the fragrance of Mary's extravagant generosity. Be in that time there with them....and you'll see not all who were there were able to perceive the newness and devotion that filled that room.

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

That is, they were threatened by sweet devotion, kind emotions, not trusting in new possibilities.

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

So were the empire makers and religious authorities who were out to stop Jesus...**and now out to stop YOU!**

And I wonder if in last weeks teaching, the father's 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.

Joy a stench because he did not trust grace and kindness (only hard work done mindlessly, even when it emptied him out and brought him resentment), ....any thing new, spontaneous, he perceived as a threat.

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Oh but...Mary, she know. She makes a spontaneous, extravagant, breath-taking gesture to the one who most needed some extra TLC. Think about it, Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem...hoping for the best but prepared to give his life in order to defy the old and give rise to the new....

Surely he was exhausted from the crowds and their expectations of him; tired of feeling hunted, just one-step ahead of the authorities; tired of Judas and his pretensions.

Surely he was anticipating what lay ahead...donkey, palms, cross, and all. How glad he must have been for that evening with friends!

And, for *her* part, Mary risked costly consequences: her perception among Jesus' other disciples, her reputation in the community, her relationship with her own brother and sister. But these things did not matter **most** to Mary.

What mattered most was Jesus' human need for an expression of love, of deep friendship, of knowing! Her care must have let him put aside things of old, former things, perhaps future worries.

I suspect both Jesus and Mary forever treasured that extravagant "inappropriate" moment!

And isn't it true? We often think about potential costs and hesitate doing anything anyone might deem inappropriate.

Stuck in time; won't allow for anything new to happen...avoiding what matters most!"

We know: nice is not what's needed most, feigned care is never appropriate, social norms may not be either.

Extravagant kindness and extravagant grace are always appropriate!

Jesus is about to approach the hostile authorities in Jerusalem.

So are you...dealing with authorities and hostilities!

He knew what lay ahead. What lays ahead of you as you head off to work or stay home to do your tasks tomorrow? Oh, if only you, too, could be so appreciated, anointed, as you head off to work or school or stay home in the face of judgment and hostility.

Imagine someone anointing you on a rough day before you even start it! Making... "Rivers in your desert", "a way in your wilderness". Imagine yourself anointing another!

Friends: Love cannot wait...and cannot be wasted!

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And when it comes to Judas...and Jesus and the poor:

Indeed, the poor are always with us, but not because of any quality of the poor. They remain with us because we continue to live our lives creating governments and policies and even churches which embody the opposite of generosity and possibility.

God/Jesus is making a political statement ... *when God says:*

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

Yes: religion and politics are to be together... it's church and state that are not! So often we are only willing to throw resources of the value of a bottle of nard at the symptom, instead of advocating for justice around the real problem! How often we appeal to some high sounding cause or principle in order to avoid action or accountability! Saying...

*Well,* she shouldn't waste the perfume, the government should.... If the schools were..... If it weren't for this or that.... This church shouldn't..... That church should....

Friends.... **There is a Judas in each one of us!** **But there is a Mary in each one of us, too!**

And Jesus steps right up and says, "Leave her alone."

Mary-the Mary within- is aware of the "sorrow and loss" and knows it's time to live your full humanity, risks and all! Consider the moments in your life when you HAVE risked costly consequences and expressed deep devotion and care for someone who needed it right then...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/discouragement, Or grasp a hand that had long since been let go.

Have you ever regretted such an action? *Is that even possible?* Today, extravagantly set your heart on Jesus Make him yours, like Mary did... be generous. ...be bold in the moment....in the moment doing *what you can*

with the one *who is at hand*.

Let go of former things, stop considering things of old, and join with God in doing a *new thing in your life!* Boldly go where no self-absorbed human has ever gone before....live the times of your life full of extravagance and generosity! Be grace for another!

*Jesus goes ahead of us* changing all the possibilities. He acts with conviction in midst of sorrow and loss, and finds, he offers peace. He tells the truth with kindness which often doesn't sound *so nice!*

The newness Jesus offers is *not* easily killed off/stopped, except through our own refusal to perceive what "springs forth"....or through the stench of our own stinginess.

It is Lent -- Smell the nard -- literally and figuratively.

Breathe it in!

Let the sweet smell of newness and devotion *fill* your senses.

Yes, there is risk!

But don't be afraid to be extravagant!

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

**Joy and hope are the uproarious celebrations through which energy for facing the day is found!**

All you have to do is see this is indeed                      **the opportune time.**

It's time...to live extravagantly...time after time!