

Good morning from a still half dark hill in Rockport....

I just heard the first birds of the morning waking up, calling to one another through the trees, getting ready to face the new day. Facing the new day.... The older I become, the more I feel challenged each morning to focus on how I will face the day. Anyone else feel that way? It would be so easy to read the early morning news each day on my little "smart phone," and become demoralized and depressed for the rest of the day. Since the beginning of the covid nightmare, and the newest nightmare in Ukraine, it has become even more challenging to face each day with optimism, hope and enthusiasm for life. Anyone else feel that way?

Enter Mary in our text for this morning's sermon – John 12:1-8. What possessed her to take the precious perfume made from "nard" and wash Jesus' feet with it and then dry those feet with her hair? What an audacious and dangerous thing to do! What a risk she took. What a daring and unheard-of action for a woman to perform in Jesus' day. Sometimes I believe we hear or read of actions taken in the stories in the Bible and read them only in obvious, but limited, ways rather than exploring them more deeply to find their meaning for us. It is easy to read the words of scripture and take them at "face value" back then, rather than digging into their underlying power in our daily lives.... far beyond their "face value".....

What daring actions are we willing to take, what revealing words are we willing to say this day for the sake of the Gospel message?

Blessings to each one this fifth Sunday in Lent..... Susan

"a pound of costly perfume"

A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston

Thomaston, Maine

Sunday, April 3, 2022

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

Scripture: John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 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 home filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (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.) 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." John 12:1-8

Will you pray with me. Extravagant God, teach us to be extravagant, too -- not in our consumption of things, but in our outpouring of love on your behalf in a

world of stinginess and too much focus on one's self rather than on others and warfare rather than lovefare. Amen.

An extravagant story of extravagant love in an unlikely form -- that is the focus of our scripture passage for today from the Gospel of John. In three of the four Gospels there is a story of a woman anointing Jesus shortly before his final journey into Jerusalem. In Matthew, Mark and John this anointing is associated with Jesus' impending death. In Luke, the story of the anointing of Jesus' feet is completed by a "sinful woman" much earlier in Jesus' brief time of ministry. (Lk 7:36-50) It relates to Jesus telling the religious officials that this woman showed a love for him that they did not. He forgave her of her sins. The religious officials were outraged at Jesus' forgiving of sins, not his extravagant acceptance of an extravagant love by a woman.

It's hard to say this without sounding sexist, but in the Gospels you can't miss the fact that the women in the stories seem far more aware of who Jesus is and why he should be followed than the men do. That's not a judgment, it's simply an observation of the stories.

The story for today is full of extravagance and notoriety -- in Jesus' day for sure. Today, all you have to do is walk through the checkout line of any grocery store and you will be bombarded with photos on the covers of many magazines with women and men touching one another in intimate poses with suggestive titles. We're lured to articles in those magazines to look at and read more about intimate relations between women and men. I find myself seeking out the self checkout line with no magazines. Frankly, I'm disgusted by all that display of sexual explicitness. This is America, though, where anything and everything seems to go.

But going back two thousand years, the idea of a woman, whether of a "sinful nature" or not, approaching a man, Jesus no less,

in a public setting, no less,

and pouring expensive perfume or her own tears over his feet, no less,

and then wiping them off with her hair, no less, is truly outrageous as well as extravagant.

I'm outraged in a grocery checkout line. I don't doubt that the religious officials, or anyone two thousand years ago, who saw a woman do what these women did in the Gospels in intimate relation with Jesus, were outraged.

But, the point of the stories is not the same point as the photos on the covers of our current day magazines. These magazines want to use sex to sell their magazines. The point of the actions of these women in the Gospels is the riskiness of expressing an extravagant love, for an extravagant individual. Jesus recognizes not only their willingness to take risks for their love, but their complete and single focused devotion to the one whom they associate with their faith, with God.

Here's the question for us for today: Are you willing to take that risk? Are you willing to show extravagant love in the name of Jesus for others? Are you willing to risk embarrassment at a tear or two, or a touch of a hand, or an embrace for someone who is in desperate need of a contact, physical or otherwise, from another human being?

These stories call us to act out our faith in extravagant ways using extravagant means -- "a pound of costly perfume" (Jn 12:3) comes in many forms nowadays -- contributions to the local food bank, or to a family needing help because a parent has cancer treatments, or so a friend or a complete stranger knows someone cares about them.

"A pound of costly perfume" in our time of too much need and too little love for those whose needs are so much greater than our own is a priceless gift.

The amazing thing about this pouring out of costly, and sometimes risky, love is what we receive in return. The woman in Luke's story of her anointing of Jesus gains forgiveness for her sins. The woman in the other Gospels who anoint Jesus, shortly before his final journey to Jerusalem and his death, gain what? The stories, as they are told, don't tell us. What does Mary gain when she washes Jesus' feet with "a pound of costly perfume" and then wipes them with her hair? (get responses)

John Westerhoff, a UCC theologian and Episcopal priest, poses the question, "What is the image of God you believe in?" Is it a God of wrath and judgment or a God of love and forgiveness? It seems to me the image of God which Mary believed in was one of loving acceptance -- THE affirmation that there IS a God, a God who cares deeply about people, a God who shows up in the form of a man who has the power to forgive sins and to heal, who ministers to all -- no matter who they are.... an individual who gives his life for all of us.

I've always wondered why Jesus didn't just walk away from what was about to happen to him after he entered Jerusalem for that last time -- which we focus on next week on Palm Sunday. Why didn't he just take Mary Magdalene as his wife and go off into the desert and have a couple of kids and maybe deliver a sermon

once in a while to a small gathering.... and live til an old age and die a proud grandfather? Why didn't he do that? (get responses)

It seems to me he didn't do that because he knew deep in his soul the extravagant love of God who conveyed to him the promise of ever present and ever lasting love, no matter what the sin of humanity might throw at him. I do believe it was the sin of humanity that killed Jesus, but it was the love of God that keeps him alive in all of us who choose to call ourselves Christians, followers of Jesus on a path of risky and radical love.

Here's the question for the day one more time: As Mary did, are you willing to take the risk to show your extravagant love of God in the name of Jesus for others?

Let the people say, "Amen." Let us prepare to receive the Lord's Supper.

Federated Church in Thomaston

United Church of Christ United Methodist Church

All Are Welcome

Sunday, April 3, 2022 – Fifth Sunday in Lent

Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, Pastor Alice Billheimer, Organist/ Choir Director
Lector: Julie Brooks

Please be respectfully silent once our worship service has begun.

An asterisk () indicates where you are invited to stand.*

***Bold print** indicates that the people speak these responses & prayers.*

GATHERING FOR WORSHIP

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude Devotion -- J. S. Bach

Pastor: We gather in the presence of God, the creator of sand and stars.

People: We gather in the presence of Christ, our guide for setting a table of welcome.

Pasrtor: We gather in the presence of the Spirit, our inspiration for moving beyond fear.

All: We gather in grace, ready to worship!

***Opening Hymn** "Come, Thou Almighty King" #15 (Red Hymnal)

A Unison Prayer of Confession & Assurance of God's Forgiveness

Gracious God, you call us to live with compassion, yet sometimes we show indifference. You call us to revise our assumptions, yet sometimes we remain stuck in our ways. You call us to cultivate hope, yet sometimes we focus on despair. You call us to reconciliation, yet sometimes we turn towards conflict. Renew us, and lead us on a path of transformation. We pray these words of confession, believing that we are always given another chance to do right, to love in the face of great odds, and to receive the forgiveness which God brings to us unconditionally and without hesitation. Amen.

A Moment of Silence

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Scripture Reading John 12:1-8

***Gloria Patri No. 70 Glory Be to the Father....**

Message “a pound of costly perfume” Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet

***Hymn of Meditation** “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee” #267 (Red Hymnal)

RESPONDING IN FAITH

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns with God and Each Other

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord’s Prayer.....

Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Offertory Theme for Lent -- Frederick Chopin

***Doxology No. 95 Blue “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow....”**

***Prayer of Dedication**

A Service of Holy Communion (see insert)

***Closing Hymn** “Now Thank We All Our God” #307 (Red Hymnal)

Benediction

Postlude He Leadeth Me -- Variations on a hymn tune by William Bradbury

Revised Common Lectionary Readings for Sunday, April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40

Especially we continue to hold in prayer our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.... Please hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus.... And all those families affected by the use of addictive drugs among their members....And all those dealing with the ravages of cancer near and far..... And all those affected, which should be every one of us, by the cruel condition of racism which continues to take the lives of too many of our Black brothers and sisters....And all those who have worked tirelessly for the building and rebuilding of our nation into one people, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.....And, from Jackie a request for prayers for Kyle Cloudier, continued prayers for Ursula recovering...and for“Cody,” who doesn’t live locally but needs prayers for guidance; Kristin Parker O’Neal, Jo Ann Parker’s daughter, who has had brain surgery and is home now!; Enid, Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, BJ Thomson & family of Mimi’s Uncle Doug, Heather Van Buskirk, and for Tiffany, Lucy’s granddaughter.....

Please feel free to contact Susan by phone (207)322-1948 or by email at freerangepastor@gmail.com to have her add or drop any names from the prayer list AND to let her know if you would like for her to stop by for a visit sometime. She’s always glad to have a chat with you!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thursday-4/7/22.....10:00 am – 2:00 pm: Quilters
Sunday-4/10/22.....9:30 am: Palm Sunday
Suggested Food Pantry Donation.....Cereal

Deacon for April, 2022: Sandra Caron

Reminders for next Sunday, 4/10/22

Greeter/Usher: Claudia Rosti and Richard

Kortright

Coffee

Host:

Lector: Alice

Billheimer

Flowers: **THERE WILL BE NO FLOWERS ON THE ALTAR DURING LENT**

Collection Total for Sunday, March 27, 2022:

Pledges - \$1942.00
Loose - \$ 394.45, of which \$190.00 is for Ukraine relief.
Total - \$2336.45

The 2022 weekly budgeted operating cost for the Church and parsonage is \$1623.00 per week.

**Federated Church of Thomaston -- United Church of Christ & United
Methodist Church
Together Since 1929**

Sunday, April 3, 2022

“The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.” ~ Annie Dillard, in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, 20th century