

Gray Weekly News



Week Leading to Sunday, April 3, 2022

Filled With the Fragrance

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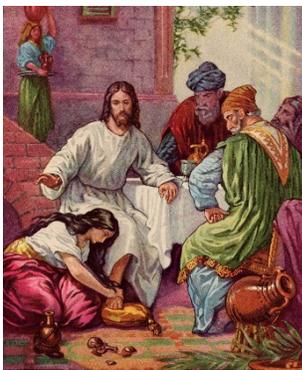
Have you ever received a gift that left you speechless? I don't mean the one that you couldn't figure out or the one that made you wonder if the giver even knew who you were! No, I mean the one that took your breath away, the one that seemed beyond the reach of the giver, the one that must have caused an accountant to gasp.

No doubt all sorts of emotions ran through you as you held that precious gift in your hands. You might have felt excited and ashamed at the same time. Perhaps you were embarrassed by the gift, as though you weren't worthy to receive such extravagance. Maybe you felt bad for the giver, afraid that he had extended himself too far to give this gift, worried that she would suffer because of what it must have cost. And it is also possible that when you did finally find your voice, the only thing you could think to say was, "You shouldn't have!"

We often don't mean it when we say that. We are excited by the gift, flattered, honored. But we say, "You shouldn't have" out of a sense of humility – maybe false, maybe real. But we are glad that they gave it. On the other hand, sometimes we mean it when we say that. We really wish that the giver had not given such a gift. Maybe it feels like a burden to accept it. "You shouldn't have," we think because now we have to live up to your image of us or live up to the gift itself.

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Fifth Sunday in Lent



Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalms 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

**Pour Out Your Praise
(There's Something About Mary?)**

News and Notes

THIS WEEK

Sunday, April 3

Please join us on Sundays at 11 am. If you are unable to come in person, you can watch our livestream at graymemorialumc.org/facebook.com or graymemorialumc.org/youtube, at 11 am or any time after that at graymemorialumc.org/



If you have prayer requests, please contact Norma Adams, Jennifer Skinner or Gail Teems.

You may also call the church office at 850/385-6441 or send a text to 850/933-8469.

Prayer Requests

Sam, Patsy and Betty

The Dunbar Family

Ann Marie – Toni’s daughter-in-law, hospitalized with diabetes complications

Jack, Randy, George, John and Patty

Brenna, Joyce and Bob

Friends in need of strength and peace of mind

All those who are suffering from accidents, illnesses and surgery

Praises for healing of Bella – Doctors in Jacksonville have released her to go home

Praises for Tallahassee Historical Festival and its sponsors

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And then sometimes an extravagant gift produces anger. At least that is what happened in our reading for this week. A familiar story, here on the brink of Holy Week, the anointing of Jesus. “Six days before the Passover,” which means it is five days before Jesus is killed. So, it is no wonder that he makes the connection between Mary’s extravagant gift and his burial. Whether Mary saw it as such is debatable. For her, it was a pouring out of self and soul; it was an act of surrender and of giving to the one she came to love so deeply. She didn’t think about the cost, only the giving.

Jesus didn’t think about the cost, only the love behind the giving. John saw this act as a prelude to Jesus’ own act of service and giving at the Last Supper only a few days away. John is less concerned about the meal than the other Gospel writers, but he is more concerned with the sacrificial service that Jesus performs for his disciples. Mary shows him that she understands the kind of loving service that Jesus calls for. Even Martha shows she understands this time. The only comment about Martha that appears in this story is the two-word phrase: Martha served.

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And then there is Judas. In Matthew's version of the anointing, the complainers are "the disciples." In Mark's version, it is "some were there." Only John identifies the complainer as Judas. Now, Mark and Matthew might also be talking about different events. In their versions, the woman (also unnamed) pours the ointment on Jesus' head. Luke has a story about the anointing of Jesus, and there it is his feet wiped with the woman's hair. But there it is tears that are used to anoint, and Jesus talks about forgiveness and not about his death. So, is it possible that this sort of thing is a regular occurrence?

If that were the case, then Judas' outburst would be even more incomprehensible. If he had seen this sort of thing many times, if he were used to Jesus accepting such gifts, then it seems he should have simply muttered to himself – "There he goes again!" Judas was a man who knew the cost of everything, but the value of nothing. He was willing to shout at Mary and say, "You shouldn't have," but his wasn't the false humility of a grateful receiver. No, John says it was the cold look of avarice on the face of a person who was aware of what he was not getting. He wouldn't be so bold as to say it should have gone to him, so he condemned the whole act as wasteful.

But you can't help but wonder if John put those words and that parenthetical explanation in the story to cover his own guilt. Maybe he had been the spokesperson earlier; maybe he was one of the "some who were there" and was now looking for someone to blame. Surely, I couldn't have said that, or thought that. That jealousy, that hunger to have could only have come from someone truly evil, right? (And, like most scholars agree, it is likely that John the Disciple didn't write the gospel that bears his name. But somehow, it seems his imprint is on it.)

Jesus points out, to all of them and to us as well, that no gift is wasteful when it is given in love, no matter how extravagant. No act of service can be demeaning when it is given in love, no matter how humble. What about that last verse, though? Aren't we in danger of misinterpretation here? Luke thought so. Luke has a consistent call toward solidarity with the poor in his Gospel.

And while his story, particularly in the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry, mirrors Mark's version in many ways, Luke leaves out this story completely. It is as if he were sure that we would seize these words as permission to let up in our ministry to and with the poor. He was afraid that we would claim this loophole in the clear command to share and give and help. "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." What does that mean? Give to Jesus more extravagantly; give to the poor out of duty? Give to Jesus everything; give to the poor some things? Give to Jesus always; give to the poor when you can?

I don't know. Honestly, I am puzzled and troubled by this verse. But I find it hard to believe that Jesus would ask us to back off giving wholeheartedly. What I wonder is whether Jesus is once again speaking to our experience, giving us a warning about how our lives are lived out sometimes. I mean, I am sure that at the time, he was trying to get across to his followers—even the slow ones—that his earthly life was coming to an end very soon. But at the same time, I wonder if he was saying to us that sometimes when we give to the poor, we will see his face and sometimes we won't. Sometimes we will know his will and feel his presence and other times we will wonder what he would have us do and wonder why he seems so far from us. But that no matter what, we should give and serve out of love, with extravagance. We should give so that those who receive might be moved to say, "You shouldn't have." Even though we know we should.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, March 30	7 pm	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Via Zoom
Thursday, March 31	10 am 5:30 pm	Bible Study Choir Practice
Saturday, April 2	8 – 12	Church Workday – Outside
Sunday, April 3	9:30 am 11 am	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Worship Service
Monday, April 4	5:30 pm	Community Yoga
Tuesday, April 5	7 pm	Finance Committee Meets
Wednesday April 6	12 noon 7 pm	Wonderful Weds Brown Bag Lunch Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Via Zoom
Thursday, April 7	10 am 5:30 pm	Bible Study Choir Practice
Sunday, April 10 PALM SUNDAY	9:30 am 11 am	Lenten Bible Study with Pastor Beth Worship Service
Monday, April 11	5:30 pm	Community Yoga