

Lent 5, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 12

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you all, in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

The question, is a good one, and it's something we ought to think about. A woman named Mary has just poured a thousand dollars worth of perfume on the feet of Jesus, she just poured it there and let it run everywhere! Oh it was a nice gesture and everything, and I'm sure it felt good on the Lord's tired tootsies—but a thousand dollars worth of perfume? Are you serious? What's going on here, says Judas. Why wasn't this money given to the poor?

Now the Gospel hastens to add that Judas really did not care about the poor. He was a thief, and had gotten into the habit of embezzling from “the common purse,” it says—which tells us I suppose, that even in a church we need to follow standard accounting practices and, have an audit once in a while—ok, fine. But, really not the point of the lesson. Judas' original question still stands, and it's a good one, something for us to think about—why *wasn't* this money given to the poor? Why was this extravagant gesture on Mary's part, somehow the right thing to do?

Let's start with the obvious: Money *should* be given to the poor. Aid *should* be rendered to persons in need, that's part of your mission as an

individual Christian, and it is certainly part of the mission of the Church as a whole. I've mentioned this in a sermon before—in the Bible there are over 2000 verses, 2000 verses that instruct us to share what we have with those around us. Giving to the poor is therefore not some little “oh by the way” that God slipped into Scripture, we can get to it whenever we feel like it—no. It is central, it is fundamental to the word and will of God for our lives: Help the poor. Feed the hungry. Now plainly some aid organizations are more efficient at this than others, and some *poor people* are maybe more likely to make good use of a helping hand, than others; so we are allowed to render due diligence when it comes to where to give our benevolence dollars. But we have to give benevolence dollars. That's not an option. Judas is not wrong, and we know it, so did Jesus and the woman named Mary—give to the poor.

But more fundamental than giving money to the poor, is giving your heart to Jesus—and that's what we see in the woman named Mary; that's what we miss in Judas. There is no escaping the fact that the Bible challenges us in our daily stewardship, there's no escaping the fact that the Gospel has social implications—but the Gospel is not a social manifesto. It's not a blueprint for a human utopia. It is first and foremost the story of salvation, for you and for all people. It's the Good News of how the Son of God Himself came

down from heaven to suffer and die on a cross to forgive you your sins, and how He then rose from the dead to open for you the way of everlasting life. It's this Good News that grasped hold of Mary that day—sins forgiven, guilt and remorse lifted; bad old habits broken, personal relationships renewed; death defeated, life everlasting now opened up before you, that's the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what grabbed hold of Mary, that's what came to her at the dinner party that day. And it changed her life. With the perfume she poured out on the Lord's feet and everywhere, Mary poured out her heart as well, "All for you Jesus. All for you." Judas I think missed that part, and sometimes so do we. Stand up for a hymn, sit down for a sermon, drop a few bucks in the plate and go home when we're done—Judas missed the part about the heart being with Jesus, and sometimes, so do we.

So yes, Mary's gesture was good, it was her heart being poured out there with the perfume so yes it was God-pleasing too. And really, in the long run it was not all that bad for the poor, either. I mean think about it: To do what Judas suggested, you would have sold the perfume, raised a thousand bucks, and given it to a soup kitchen—that's nice. It is, really. But it's a token. A good-sized token, I'll grant you that, but a token, and they get used up. But Mary's is the gift that keeps on giving. You see, when Jesus gives you His

heart, and you give Him yours in return: Well when is *that* ever used up?

The heart is not a token, when does the heart ever run out of love, when does the person who belongs to Jesus ever run out of compassion? Ever? I mean, anybody can give a few dollars to the poor once in a while. and they do, it's wonderful, but. Jesus Christ poured out His heart for us, He poured out His life!—that's not a token, that's not a nice gift that eventually gets used up—He gave everything we need now and forever! The gift, that keeps on giving for all eternity, that's Jesus Christ. And in response, when that Good News of God grabs hold of us, we pour out our hearts and lives for Him and for His people and when you do that—you're not going to be satisfied with tokenism anymore. You're not going to drop a few bucks in the plate and call it a day. Instead, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, you'll learn at last to give and try and help, then give and try and help some more, whatever it takes as long as it takes—because that's what Jesus would do. Bottom line, in the long run, I think people in need back then got a much better deal from Mary, whose life was changed, then they ever would have from Judas, who merely wanted to write a check.

Well. Judas would have given money that day, but he planned on keeping his heart for himself. Judas would have been more than happy with making a generous donation—and he would have stopped right there. Judas you see

was not about to get carried away. Mary, got carried away. She offered Jesus her heart and with her heart, she offered everything. Her whole life for the Lord, and the Lord's people, she got carried away here! And she could *afford* to get carried away like that, because she knew that Jesus, got carried away for her—He was carried away on a cross, after all. He was carried away to a tomb. Jesus got carried away for her, so Mary knew she could afford to get carried away for Him, and for His people. And so can we. Not tokens only, but the heart, given to Jesus and poured out for Him, the one who poured out His life for us. In His name we pray, AMEN.