

**March 13, 2016 -Lent 5 (Yr. C)**  
**John 12:1-8**  
**The Rev. Carenda Baker**

Well once again, there she is at the feet of Jesus. OK. Let's just name Mary for who she is. She is a radical disciple. Radical is derived from the word - "root". Mary gets down to the root of discipleship. She is all about her relationship with the rabbi Jesus, her friend.

I can just imagine there was a fair amount of scuttlebutt once word spread about Jesus' latest dinner visit at the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. I can imagine some whispering going on. "What do you think got into her? Do you think there's more than meets the eye going on between them – between Mary and Jesus?"

Of course there was something going on between them. Mary has fallen in love with Christ, with God the gracious lover of souls, who looks with compassion and a multitude of mercies upon all who seek him, who turn to him for help. Mary is in love with the God who loves her. Mary adores the God who adores her. Mary revels in the joy that comes from her very soul being laid bare before her Maker and finding there, instead of judgement, love and holy desire for her soul, for her true self, for **her**.

Without a doubt, Mary is extremely grateful to Jesus for raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. Yes, she is grateful. But she is moved beyond gratitude to adoration, to an act that goes far beyond common sense and business as usual. Far beyond doing all things in proper order, and according to social and religious custom. Mary's offering of expensive perfume, the offering of herself as a woman as she wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, the intimacy with which she serves Jesus – all these are signs of a changed life, a life transformed resulting in a heart broken open by the love of God and spilling over. How could her love NOT be poured out to Jesus?

I don't know how it is for you, but in my conservative Pennsylvania Dutch upbringing, I was pretty much steeped in the school of "it's better to always play it safe". You know – be cautious. Emotions always well-measured and under control, kept in check with no extremes of joy or sorrow shared openly with anyone. And of course, calculating the cost. Always calculating the cost, because the specters of fear and scarcity colored the landscape of life and relationships with others. It's as if the worst thing in the world is to be vulnerable, to live with an undefended heart, to be passionate. Human, in other words. Mary's lavish actions challenge us. How ready are we really to step beyond the often confining and stifling boundaries of what is termed "normal", "logical", and "acceptable" in order to worship God by giving our whole selves to God in love?

Mary gives Jesus a very tangible gift in the rich and aromatic perfume that fills the house with its scent, as she pours it over his feet. She gives Jesus the gift of quality time, the gift of physical touch, the gift of service. It is a prophetic and courageous act Mary engages in. You see, this perfume was intended for use when someone died, to

prepare the body for burial, so hers was a prophetic act of preparing Jesus for burial. Maybe the perfume had originally been bought for her own burial. Perhaps then, Mary also gave Jesus the gift of understanding. Maybe she intuited that Jesus might not be with them much longer, so she had to seize this moment, NOW, to show her deep love for Jesus while he was still present with them. I can imagine Jesus being deeply moved, that at least one disciple seemed to understand that what he had been telling them, would be happening to him very soon. Perhaps this was Mary's way of saying good-bye to Jesus. She may have known that those opposing Jesus had become even more intent on ending his life after he raised Lazarus from the dead. And in fact, they planned to kill Lazarus as well. Mary may have sensed that something ominous was in the air, though she could not have known how hideous the events in the coming days would be. In anointing Jesus, Mary's humble loving service mirrors what Jesus will do for the disciples at the Last Supper by taking up the towel and basin as a servant to wash their feet. And it points to what Jesus will do in pouring out his life for the world.

There are 2 important invitations for us in this story of Mary, Jesus' disciple, who anoints him so lavishly with her love.

1. We are invited to attend closely to our relationship with the Lord, especially in these next two weeks. We are called to take an honest look at how often we "play it safe"; how we dole out love one little drop at a time; how much fear and scarcity thinking controls us; how our concern about following social convention, not wanting to look foolish, and wanting to avoid criticism dulls our witness to the life-changing, transformative and reconciling love of God in Christ. We are invited to look at what kind of "Jesus people" we are.

2. We are invited to identify the perfume in our own life that we need to pour out in love and gratitude to God, for the sake of the world. Where are we being called to pour out our adoration of God in the ways we live each and every day? At home. At work. In the community. At the grocery store. While we're driving. It might be most evident in our caring for a spouse, child, or grandchild. Mary's entire life was an act of worship, because worship is what happens when a life is opened up and poured out to Jesus Christ. Worship can happen every day. It's not reserved for Sunday morning only. So how are we being called to offer ourselves as something beautiful for God?

I would invite you to sit and think about these two invitations. Pray into them. Take a long hard look at your relationship with Jesus, and list for where God is calling you to pour out your unique perfume for the sake of the world in response to God's lavish love for you.

As often happens for me, the Spirit has brought to mind a song that will be a guide for my personal self-examination and offering in the coming weeks. It is an African American gospel song called "Give Me Jesus". I will sing it as my prayer starting today and as part of my preparation for entering into the journey with Jesus, from garden and cross to tomb and resurrection. For each of us here today, I pray that God will move our hearts to enter into a deeper outpouring of love, which will transform us, and bless the world in Jesus' name.

Let us pray.

*[Priest sings the following song, "Give Me Jesus"]:*

"In the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, in the morning when I rise, give me Jesus.

Give me Jesus, give me Jesus. You may have all this world. Give me Jesus.

And when I come to die. And when I come to die. And when I come to die, give me Jesus. Give me Jesus, give me Jesus. You may have all this world. Give me Jesus."