

**Extravagant Service**  
**Sardis Baptist Church**  
**3-13-2016**  
**John 12:1-8**

Jesus is weary. Tired. Perhaps even homesick. Ministry is hard. He's walked thousands of miles; he's slept in too many strange places to count; he's been a dinner guest at a thousand tables; and he's most likely had tens of thousands of conversations with strangers. Jesus is always in motion. And that make me wonder: "Where does this sojourner call home?"

Today's text tells us that Jesus' home is in Bethany at the residence of Lazarus and Mary and Martha. These are friends who know him, love him, sustain him. In this place, Jesus can be vulnerable – it's a place where he has laughed and wept, and everything in between. Bethany is a sanctuary of sorts.

Jesus needs to be here. Passover is coming, and with it the culmination of his earthly ministry. For three years, Jesus has been telling the disciples about his true nature, about his approach to Jerusalem, about the chaos that his presence at the Passover Festival will cause, about his certain death, about the day when they will be the new stewards of his work. And for three years, the disciples have failed to grasp what Jesus has been telling them.

And tonight it's no different. Jesus and the disciples gather at the home of Lazarus and Mary and Martha. The disciples begin their evening routine of theology roulette – each one jockeying to demonstrate their service or loyalty or command of Torah. Each one still oblivious to God's presence in their midst, still oblivious to what will happen next.

Undaunted by their stubbornness, Jesus patiently answers their questions, and continues to do his best to prepare the disciples for what's ahead.

Jesus' hosts notice the strain of his ministry: bags under his eyes, greying temples and beard, shoulders that appear so tense. And they know his time is coming. This is his last visit. And so they minister to Jesus – they remind him that he's home.

Lazarus sits next to his friend, beaming to have him home again. And I picture Lazarus asking Jesus, "How are you? Really, how are you?" And I picture Martha attending to his needs. She knows that Jesus loves her hash brown casserole, and she's gonna make sure he gets plenty. She takes pleasure in doting on her friend.

Lazarus and Martha minister to Jesus by making their home his home. They are extravagant hosts.

But Mary outdoes her extravagant siblings. Her instincts tell her what Jesus needs most. Mary has watched her friend serve others. Because of Jesus, she knows that when we're attuned to the needs of others, in essence, we're attuned to the needs of God. And in this very moment, Mary senses that Jesus needs to know his ministry has mattered, needs to know that someone has listened, needs to know that his closest friends will pursue a life of service.

Mary doesn't say a word. Instead, she reaches for a jar of nard, perhaps the most precious thing in her home. The contents are worth an entire year's paycheck. She breaks the jar open, finds her friend Jesus, and uses the whole container to anoint his feet. And then she uses her hair to dry his feet.

In one action, she demonstrates a complete command of Jesus' teachings.

First, Jesus preached about the life abundant, and his miracles were full of abundance: twelve barrels of wine, good wine; twelve baskets left over of loaves and fishes; living water that quiches more than thirst. Mary understands that the abundant life starts and ends with Jesus' presence. In the presence of Messiah, she has no need to hoard what's precious – she pours it all out, nothing to spare. All of the nard, and all of herself. Jesus will do the same on Good Friday.

Second, Mary knows that Jesus' death is imminent. And following in the Jewish tradition, she uses the nard to anoint his body properly for death. The anointment is an acknowledgement to Jesus that she knows who he is and what he must do.

Finally, Mary demonstrates service. Jesus will replicate her actions in the Passover meal with the disciples. He will wash each person's feet and remind them that if their teacher can serve them, then they too can serve one another.

Now y'all may think I'm taking liberties with this text. And maybe I am. But I believe that we cannot underemphasize the humanity of Jesus. He lived the human experience. And to live the human experience is to know loneliness and doubt and fear and anxiety. On the eve of Passover week, I imagine a Jesus who experienced all of these things. But in this fragile state, Jesus also knew the other side of the human experience: love, support, encouragement, warmth, friendship.

Lazarus, Martha, and especially Mary, noticed a Jesus who needed their support. And they gave it to him. And I think that support helped buoy Jesus to face the awfulness of the week that followed.

This morning, we're about to ordain two people whom we've chosen as servants to this place. And as we ordain them, we'll reflect on how we'll also be servants to them, and to all who gather here.

The Judases at the table will encourage us to engage in practical servanthood. They'll tell us not to waste our love on big gestures or intangible gifts – the proper service of this church will be reflected in balance sheets and headcounts and good ole utilitarian resources. And to be sure, we should be smart stewards of this place.

But. But, we would also do well to remember the extravagant giving of Mary and her siblings. They loved him. And spoiled him. And so they gave to him in a bigger-than-life kind of way. Not for documentation. Not for gain. But rather, they did so because they recognized his presence among them, and they had to celebrate.

Sardis Baptist Church, Christ's presence is in this place!!! We may not all have two pints of Chanel #5 available for a spontaneous anointment. But each of us has a container full of love, love that we can dole out with extravagance. And perhaps such extravagance will make a home for every member of the body of Christ, the kind of home that gives them courage to face the dangers and anxieties of what Jerusalem's rejection will bring.

Extravagant love steadied Christ for Friday's sting. And extravagant love paved the way for Sunday's triumph.

Friends, if we are to make the leap from Friday to Sunday, we too must serve one another with extravagant love. May God give us that strength this day and every day. Amen.