

Lent C-5, 2007  
John 12: 1-12  
March 25, 2007  
Title: Serve

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.....

A picked a guide for upcoming movies at one of our local theatres. Each movie was put into a category. Thriller, drama, action, melodrama, Comedy, suspense, horror. Some were more fine tuned: tragedy and comedy.

How might dinner with Jesus at Lazarus home be categorized? A tragedy— Listen to the voice of Judas, the deceitful disciple, wondering about wasting costly ointment. Or is it a comedy? A true comedy is about restoring someone to community. Talking about the ultimate in restoration—Lazarus, dead, is brought to life! And how about the drama—Mary lovingly expressing with heaven scent her love for Jesus. What more dramatic act is there then washing someone's feet with your hair? And how about Jesus' commentary on the anointing pointing to his death—is this a horror? The one so loved knowing he would be so rejected?

With so much placed in this story it defies category.  
Even for us today to emphasize service and point to this story  
Seems to miss speak.

Service? Well there is Mary serving her Lord. But there is the voice of Judas, regardless of motive—who demands the nard be sold and given to the poor. Sounds like service.

I have a suspicion we'd best put four stars by Mary as exemplar of service. Mary's anointing of Jesus an image of loving service in the world.

And beside Judas zero stars. Judas' bland practicality flattens joy.

Mary comes to Jesus after dinner and offers him the best thing she can find. In one lavish moment pours out her gratitude. What inexplicable joy she must have felt, she could not contain it. What full, embodied intimacy with God. No longer was Lazarus smelling of death. How could Mary not burst forth with sheer, unmeasured delight.

What's Mary got to teach us? She encourages us to first pay attention, be alert to the vital hand of God in our lives...and as we do we cannot help but pour out our costliest perfume.

Several years ago a household in our Church called me  
Over to their home. They'd had a car accident; no one was  
Hurt. In fact, when they described it there wasn't much of  
An accident, just a fender bender....BUT  
They were grateful and wanted their pastor to join  
The celebration. The aroma of Jesus.

Is it possible that by welcoming as we will during  
Easter 5 members of the Mnene parish that we participate  
In the sweet aroma of Jesus.  
And that because a new community in Southeast Raleigh,  
Joy of Discovery is being birthed many lives will  
Be reborn with the fragrance of new life.

And that Lazarus walks among us. New life is given where we  
Assumed death, and our work, service is to get on board with  
What our Lord Jesus is doing....and waste ourselves in  
The wonder and joy of service.

Give us more Marys...willing to bring a dish of food to person in need,  
Willing to listen again and again to the same story, willing to pour herself  
out with the neighbor whose spouse has left, willing to reach out to the youth  
whose behavior is a cry for help.  
Give us more Marys---whose wastefulness is Christ like who cannot help but  
Pour out themselves like costly perfume.

It doesn't smell like Lazarus' home around here all the time.  
We get diverted by the smell of death—  
Do you not smell it when people say "It's the same  
People who do all the work all the time" That in itself  
Isn't the smell of death... But then when  
new persons are ignored....

Do you not smell it when we struggle to grow our giving? And people look around at each other and see not precious lives the Lord is seeking to fulfill, but rather see folks through their billfold.

For every Mary there is likely also a Judas.  
Judas, in this case, the voice tempering the extravagance of Mary, the Voice of practicality and proportion.

When Mark Twain finally mastered the intricacies of Piloting a steamboat on the Mississippi and had catalogued in His mind every feature of the great river, he confessed to a Deep deprivation:

“I have lost something which can never be restored to me in my life. All the grace and beauty had now gone out of the majestic river. Familiarity with the river had killed a spirit of wonder.

Must everything we do be useful? Service, yes. But before we serve, before we do, we are to be!

We are people with songs and souls, called into this life to have rich experiences with each other.

Until we have wasted time with each other writes the poet Gerhard Frost, we have not fully lived.

Who can put a value on a well sung solo, on a robust hymn,  
On a sermon that lingers, on a night spent up with a friend  
In need?

Those who know the exact price of things, as Judas did, often don't know the true cost of anything. So Judas could not see the value in wasting a pound of perfume.

I wonder about those of us who've never lost themselves in a song, never cried when a child was baptized, never allowed themselves to say in their Own words—Lord Jesus, I love you!!  
Never been overcome with joy. Never felt forgiveness poured over you or the weight of sin lifted

By the measure of practical Judas the Apostle Paul wasted a well spent life.  
As a Pharisee Paul had everything going for him.  
This life Paul called RUBBISH—dead weight.

Christ had surpassing value for Paul. Nothing could compare to it.  
And because of this Paul wants most to know Christ and the power  
Of his resurrection. This is the goal he presses on for.

These words are Paul's personal mission statement borne out of  
thanksgiving to Christ. In our Baptism into Christ we too are given  
A personal mission statement:

“To let our lights shine before others, that they may see our  
good works and glorify our Father in heaven!”  
What's this smell like in you?  
What price for such wastefulness?

“To fill the house, the church, the world with the fragrance of Christ's love.  
The sweet aroma of God's love is wafting in the air. It sticks in Mary's hair,  
on Paul's feet, and fills the places they go.

Has anyone caught a whiff of God's love on us lately?”

It may seem like a very mundane thing for us to  
Believe, to belong and to SERVE  
But I rise to tell you this is life, this is beauty, this  
Is the very scent of heaven.

May you and I know to whom to offer our best  
Jesus, who is going to Jerusalem.  
Can't you smell it?  
Amen.