

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church

The Fifth Sunday of Lent: April 6, 2025

The Love Gift

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. There is so much to unpack in today's readings.

In today's Gospel we are presented with two different ways of being. Interestingly enough Mary has been there before. In an earlier reading Mary has been compared to Martha. Seemingly in a similar circumstance where Martha was busy making meal preparations and Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen. Both are ways of honoring the Lord, one way through service, and another through devotion.

In today's Gospel scene we have a comparison between Judas, who leaves us wondering about his intentions, but also with a feeling that he is concerned about economy, and Mary who is pouring out a year's worth of wages in beautiful fragrant oil upon Jesus' feet is sharing an expensive gift. Truly a declaration of love, and an understanding that Jesus is headed to his death.

I think what's going on with Mary in today's gospel is that she is a woman in complete devotion to Jesus. Maybe as only a woman can, she is the incarnation here of the feminine in contrast with the masculine economy. She loves because she loves. She anoints because she anoints. She fragrances because she fragrances. There is no other why to her purpose.

It is a true gift, “grace upon grace.” There is nothing in it for her. It is unconditional, without measure or calculation. And to others it looks reckless and irresponsible. Mary is not invested in a result or seeking a particular outcome. She’s just doing what she’s doing because that’s what she’s doing. She breaks the chains of a means to an end. And it makes no sense to Judas or any other economist.

A true gift stands in contrast to economy, even as Mary stands in contrast to Judas. “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” In any event of his true intentions Judas is calculating and practical. He knows the market. He’s an investor looking for a return. He wants to turn Mary’s gift into a profit. Judas has a why. He’s aligned himself with a means to an end. In the economies of our life everything has a why; life is calculable, and we become calculating. We expect a return on our investment whether that investment is money, time, love, or a good deed, and we can lose our true relationships when we treat each other economically.

What if the purpose of John’s writing is to show that they are not two opposite lives or people but two aspects of our own lives? of being human? Two ways of living and relating? As mentioned earlier we often read the Martha and Mary story this way. What if we hold both Mary and Judas within ourselves? What if they are images of ourselves, images of our charitable self and our economic self, images of our unconditioned life and our conditioned life?

When have you been Mary and when have you been Judas? What's your experience of the two? In what ways have they shaped or misshaped your life?

I don't think it's a question of choosing one over the other; gift or economy, Mary or Judas, but of living in the tension of the two. That tension is what sometimes keeps us up at night; calls us into question; and awakens us to how we truly want to live. That tension is the call to be discerning and thoughtful about how we respond to others and engage in life. That tension pushes us to look within ourselves at our motives and desires. That tension reveals that Mary and Judas (gift and economy) are interwoven, and each has the possibility of the other. It reminds us that the fragrance of life can be neither bought nor sold. It's priceless.

As if that was not enough, Mary's fragrant gift was so complete that "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." The gift to Jesus overflowed and became a gift to all. So it is, when we gift from the heart.

As we come to the close of Lent, hopefully having participated in self-reflection, meditated on God's laws, and Jesus' mercy and love, we can better discern how we want to live our lives in a way that is a gift to those we know. Jesus is also showing us there are times of abundance, and they are good. We are meant to work towards a better world, but we are also shown right here in Jesus that we are to appreciate and celebrate markers in our lives before we die.

Mary is the first to model the servanthood of foot-washing that will come shortly during Holy week. This is a reminder to us that the women were not left out, but, in fact, were very active within the community of disciples,

even if most of their stories have been lost. This act is not one of slavery, but one of equality. For Jesus' society was not one to have an unmarried male and female interact. In Jesus' eyes, Mary is not less than; she is a beloved disciple.

Jesus knew he was headed to the cross, and next week he will enter Jerusalem like a king. So he accepted the gift of anointing prior to his journey toward death. And so, we are called to understand our own true motives when we offer a true gift. Are we doing so to make ourselves feel good, get a return on our investment, or are we like Mary offering out of love?

Are we being good stewards to the things that matter to us and the gifts God has given us? And lastly, do we celebrate life? Do we come together and praise God from whom all blessings flow? Because we too, whether we admit or not, will be headed to our own Jerusalem, our own death.

We all contain within us an economic Judas, and I pray we also have inside us a beloved disciple gifting our Lord from our heart. Amen