

Noticing Love

Texts: Philippians 2:1-13, Mark 14:3-9
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – August 29, 2021
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This morning, on this final sermon that I will preach to you as your pastor, we finish up our time together with the discipline of noticing. Noticing love. Noticing love in ourselves. Noticing love in others. We desperately need to love more – to love in the way that is described to us in our Scripture lessons for today.

In the Gospel lesson for this morning, some have noticed that this woman is loving wastefully, and not in a positive way. Jesus is gathered with some of His disciples and friends to the home of Simon the leper. As they were gathered at his table, an unnamed woman came up to them, broke open a very expensive jar of ointment, and anointed Jesus' head with it. It must have been a real beautiful sight, a real act of love. Unfortunately, not everyone thought that it was the most practical use of the ointment. They complained in anger and said, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." Then they yelled at the woman for her wasteful action.

But Jesus looks deeper to the real reason for this woman's offering of love to Him. The disciples will always have the poor with them, but Jesus knows that His time on earth is short. This woman's act of loving wastefully is done knowing that Jesus means something to her, right then and there. "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." There is no question that this act would be remembered for its innocent, pure love and devotion for thousands of years.

Is that the way we love? Is that the way that we show Jesus our love for Him - and for each other? Is the way you love patient and kind, not self-seeking, always

looking out for the good, a love that never ends? Or is your love given and shared with strings attached? Do you say, without hesitation, “I love you,” but then follow it up with, “But I would love you more if...”

Is that noticing love? Is that loving without regard for anyone or anything? Or is it nothing more than trying to look out for yourself instead of the One who looks out for you day after day, time after time? That is not how Christ saw it. Instead, he noticed this unnamed woman’s act as an act of love and devotion. He praised her and told those gathered in Simon’s house on that day that she would be remembered forever because of her generosity and kindness to Jesus. Her act of wasteful love would be an example for generations to come. Is that what people will say about you in generations to come - that you loved wastefully? That you gave of yourself in a way that was selfless, humble, and obedient to God?

I want to close with a story I read in a fiction book written by a Presbyterian pastor about a pastor of a small church. It was part of the pastor’s final sermon to the church where he had served faithfully for many years. This part of the book as it relates to love.

The pastor says, “After the sermon, I moved from the pulpit to the communion table. There was set a heavenly banquet of Wonder Bread and Welch’s grape juice. Over the sticky perfume of the trays of shot-glass cups and cubed white bread, I looked across the table at all the saints. I knew their stories, often I knew more than I wanted to. ‘This is the joyful feast of the people of God,’ I began, a declaration countered by the evidence.

Every year as a part of this day's feast [*it being All Saints Sunday*] we read the names of those who have passed from this life into the congregation oddly named the Church Triumphant. Then we imagine the truth: that this is a table that stretches into eternity. We rise as the names are read and stand in sober silence for an eternal minute. The list is lately too long for a congregation this small...

After reading the names of the saints departed, the saints present sat themselves down on their mortal bums. I turned to the feast set before us and said the Words of Institution for this last time in this place. Then I raised the flagon and chalice, pouring the sweet, unfermented fruit of the vine from one to the other. For the first time in my life, I spilled it. I was looking at faces, not what I was doing. My cup overflowed, sticky sweet grape juice running down my arm and robe and onto the white linen cloth covering the table. It struck me funny, this Psalmic image of abundance, but I maintained clerical composure.

I whole broke the loaf set before me for that purpose without incident and took my seat in the single oak minister's chair set behind the table. Along with everybody else, I waited to be served, first the tray with soft, white bread carved that morning into neat half-inch cubes by Ardis Wilcox and Bob Beener's wife, Elaine. Flesh and blood is such a jolting and coarse image, the stuff of mortal being; we have rendered it tidy and easily handled.

Larry Wilcox was one of four elders serving that morning. He brought the plate of bread to one end of the lone choir pew; they passed it soberly onto the next. Larry retrieved it at the other end of the pew and moved to me. I reached for a cube, pinching it daintily between my index finger and thumb. But as I lifted it off the plate, ten more little

cubes followed. This one slice of Wonder Bread had not been cut quite clean through. I shook my chosen piece to dislodge the others, but they held on tenaciously. Suddenly the sequestered emotion of the day burst out in a silent, trembling laughter. Again I shook my piece, again to no avail. And then I laughed in church, as I had not since I was a poorly behaved child. Larry Wilcox watched me, plate in hand. He saw my giggles and started to chortle himself, his shoulders shaking with suppressed mirth. Soon I noticed that most of the congregation was doing the same, not open laughter of course, but something even more fun, hidden, like children hide their giggles from adults. The joyful feast of the people of God. You reach for one little piece of grace and find that you have more on your hands than you deserve or ever imagined you needed” (from Michael L. Lindvall. Leaving North Haven. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002. pp. 246-47, 249-50).

I tell you this story this morning because I believe that it fits right in with this congregation and its history. Today, we have reached this point in our history together. “You reach for one little piece of grace and find that you have more on your hands than you deserve or ever imagined you needed.” Remember that grace – and see it in one another. Live out that grace with one another and with the world around you. You have seen Christ here, and you have loved Him. You have served Him, and we have enjoyed moments of laughter and joy in Christ’s presence with one another. Love extravagantly. Love wastefully. Just love.

Loving God, we thank You for all of the examples in Scripture of how to love, especially as Your love for us was manifested in Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Savior. Help us, each and every day of our lives, to love wastefully, to notice opportunities around us to love others and show Your love. May we be selfless, humble, devoted, and wasteful in our service to You. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

