

Love Poured Out

John 12: 1-8

March 21, 2010

United Memorial

© Rev. Catherine MacDonald

Will you join me in a moment of prayer.

May the words of my lips and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Anybody here watch the show Dragon's Den?

For those of you who don't, it is a show where Canadian entrepreneurs pitch their product or service to 5 very wealthy investors.

I watch it most weeks and last week the show was the stories about the investors themselves.

They are all very different people, from different backgrounds and who are now enjoying a lifestyle that is very different from what they grew up in.

One of them, Brett Wilson, made millions in the 80s, but his work habits ultimately cost him his family, and his divorce was finalized the same day he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

He makes more deals than any of the other dragons, and they often take into consideration the bigger picture... he invests in people and makes them the focus of his decisions.

Sometimes he makes deals that don't make sense on a rational level, but make sense on an emotional level.

And he appears to have compassion for those hopeful entrepreneurs who have an idea and are so passionate about it.

Don't misunderstand me, he likes to get a return on his investment, but he is also known for his philanthropic work.

It seems that he has come to realize that holding on to his money for its own sake doesn't do him or the world any good.

Sometimes I think he makes deals just for the fun of it and to drive fellow dragon Kevin O'Leary nuts!

Now Kevin is a very different dragon... all he seems to be concerned with is making more money.

He will often say to a hopeful entrepreneur something like, "I don't care that this will save the trees, how is it going to make me money."

Or, "My money is lonely over here... it wants more."

And he is often harsh and scathing in his comments to those who appear on the show.

I don't know if he supports anything to improve the quality of life for anyone except himself. I am not saying he doesn't, but if he does, I am not aware of it.

These men have two very different views of what it means to be wealthy.

Two very different views of how to use their money.

And it seems to me, two very different views of what it means to be part of the human family.

Brett seems to be saying, "I have been blessed with financial resources beyond my wildest imagining and I am going to use some of that to make the world a better place."

And has told his family that he intends to give away all his wealth before he dies.

The other, seems to be most concerned with accumulation... for himself and a small circle around him... in a biblical sense, storing up treasure...

In the 80s, there used to be a saying, "He who dies with the most toys, wins."

But that soon changed to, "He who dies with the most toys, still dies!"

What does all this have to do with our reading this morning?

Last week I spoke of the extravagant love of the father for his wayward son in the story of the Prodigal Son.

And how that love was an indication of God's love for us, immeasurable love, poured out for us.

Today we have another story of immeasurable love... a love displayed by a woman...

A love that poured out rich oil on Jesus without counting the cost.

How many of you thought that Judas had a point when he said why didn't you sell this ointment and give it to the poor?

I confess that I certainly have some of those thoughts when I see charitable organizations, including churches spend money on things for themselves at the expense of being a place of welcome and healing love for the world.

And that love and welcome might entail pouring out all we have....

How many of you had trouble with the lines that Jesus said, "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Does this sound rather callous to your ears?

It did to me.

So, as I did some reading and research, I found out that those lines come from the book of Deuteronomy, one of the books of law in the Hebrew scriptures, and one that Jesus would have been well acquainted with.

Let me read you the passage:

It is from Deuteronomy 15: 7-11

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour.

You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, "The seventh year, the year of remission, is near," and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.

Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land."

Open your hand... give liberally and ungrudgingly...

And if pick up a piece of scripture from Matthew 25:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

Jesus says that whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome those who are not like us, visit the sick and imprisoned, we are feeding, clothing and welcoming Jesus.

Mary did that when she anointed Jesus... she knew there was a bigger picture... she didn't hoard the oil for her own use... she used it to offer healing and comfort to Jesus.

The message on the sign this week are words that our United Church moderator, Mardi Tindal spoke this summer, "There is enough for everyone, but not for everyone's greed."

This is quite profound to me... there is enough for everyone when we share...

As a community of faith, I don't think we are greedy... in fact, I know that you and we are generous people when our hearts are touched.

But I do think that as a community of faith, we are fearful.

Instead of being thankful for the financial resources we have been given... resources that are meant to enable ministry here, resources that are meant to be poured out as healing oil, we are fearful.

Fearful that what we offer won't be appreciated...

Fearful that with such huge problems in the world, that we can't make a difference...

Fearful that if we share what we have now, at some point in the future, we won't have enough for ourselves...

Do we lose what it means to be a community of faith when we do that?

Some of the questions I pondered and sent out this week to those of you who have email are:

- How often do we save our resources for some point in the future?
- What prevents us from offering the soothing balm of oil to a hurting world?
- How do trust God to provide for our needs and be generous?

These are not questions that are easy to answer.

Neither are they meant to provoke guilt.

They are reflections of my own spiritual strugglings about what it means to be the church in this time and place.

About what it means to follow Jesus, whose concern for those on the margins of society was paramount.

I hope you can join me in the struggle.

In a few minutes we are going to sing the hymn 'Said Judas to Mary.'

Listen to the words of the last verse in which Jesus is speaking:

*'The poor of the world are my body,' he said,
'to the end of the world they shall be;
the bread and the blankets you give to the poor
you'll know, you have given to me,' he said,
'you'll know you have given to me.'*

Let us, like Mary, offer the balm of healing love to the world and know that we have offered it to Jesus.

Thanks be to God, amen.