

***This Love Changes Each Today©***

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ephesians 1:3-8, John 12:1-11

March 22, 2015

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Isn't it ironic that because Jesus gives life to others – as he did when he raised Lazarus from the dead – it is the religious authorities who commit to killing Jesus? And yet, we have this paradox: Jesus' death brings new life to all.

Today's gospel reading from John ends with a reminder that Jesus is getting very close now to his journey to Jerusalem for the last time. John tells us that the chief priests began planning, not just to have Jesus killed, but Lazarus as well.

Yes, it's true. This love changes each today. It changed it for the religious rulers who did not like the idea of the people becoming so excited about Jesus that they were losing their power and authority.

But let's look in at this special dinner that was given in honor of Jesus. It was just before Passover, which is a very special time for the Jews. But that wasn't what this dinner was about.

This was a dinner to give honor to Jesus, the guest, the good friend of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. But, it wasn't just because they were good friends, either.

What had happened just before this was epic! Lazarus had been dead – for four days. But Jesus came and called to him to rise, and Lazarus came out of the tomb – alive again.

Mary is overcome with love and thanksgiving for Jesus. We know this isn't the first time Mary is found sitting at Jesus' feet, in awe of him, taking in his every word. She actually had her sister, Martha, pretty ruffled that other time, when Martha thought Mary needed to be up serving with her, instead of lollygagging around.

But, in Jesus' eyes, Mary is the one who finds favor each time. It's not that there is anything wrong with serving, but spending time with Jesus is very important.

This time, Mary, once again, goes to sit at Jesus' feet, but now she does something most unusual. It was an odd thing for a woman to touch a man, especially one she is not related to.

And while this was a dinner in their home, back then, people could come and be on the sidelines, watching and listening to hear what the rabbi, or, other important person

might say. In other words this dinner was far from being a private affair. What Mary did, was seen by many people.

Mary was so overcome with love and appreciation for Jesus' ... especially now that he gave her brother back his life ... she took a very expensive jar of perfume and broke the jar, allowing the fragrant oil to pour out over Jesus' feet. And then, she wiped his feet ... with her hair!

We can imagine the strong, heady smell of the perfume filling the air. And also probably being stunned at what we see. This woman seems to throw out all convention, all inhibitions to show Jesus how much she loves him. It is intimate and passionate, and may seem sensual, but that isn't the kind of love John is saying she had for Jesus.

This is a love that has grown for him as Lord because the longer she has had to get to know him, to sit at his feet and learn from him, the more she has seen of his compassion and healing works, the more convinced she is that he is the One sent from God.

Mary is a disciple, pure and simple. And she is showing her devotion to him in the only way she knows how – in the most extravagant way possible for her. She is worshipping and adoring her Lord.

And then we get to Judas, who acts like he is indignant because Mary has wasted so much money – on Jesus – instead of selling that perfume and giving the money to the poor.

Well, what about that? It sounds good, in a way, doesn't it? Rather than pouring it out on someone's dirty feet – even if he IS the Son of God – wouldn't Jesus – who has cared so much for the poor – prefer that the money for that perfume be given to help the poor? Makes sense, doesn't it?

Except Jesus did not agree. He told Judas to leave Mary alone! He said you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me with you.

It's not that Jesus was dismissing the value of helping the poor. Judas isn't wrong for advocating for those who are vulnerable and struggling.

But, Judas was creating a competition between an act of pure love and devotion – of worship really – and acts of justice and compassion. Both are important, but Jesus is telling Judas in this moment, Mary has done the best and right thing.

And here we have another hint that Jesus' death is pending. He indicates that this perfume is a symbol of burial oils. "She bought it," he says, "so that she might keep it for the day of my burial,"

And we also have the first real hint about Judas – that he is not the disciple he wants people to think he is. John kind of whispers to us on the side, telling us that Judas didn't really care about the poor. He had a habit of stealing from the treasury and he most likely thought that would have helped him quite a bit.

So Mary was showing extravagant love to the one who gave new life to her brother, thus giving a new life to her. It's true that this love – the love Jesus showed for Lazarus and his sisters – this love changes each today.

A few days before, Lazarus was in the tomb, dead, and all were in grief and agony. Today, Lazarus is with them and everything has changed. New life is celebrated.

But, ironically, the one who gave new life to so many others, will be making the journey to his death in just a few days. And Mary's extravagant love for Jesus was part of the final decision of the religious authorities to get rid of him. So much devotion! So much faithfulness and adoration! Yes, this love changes each today. This love changes everything, it seems for everybody! It did for Mary, for Martha and Lazarus. And it certainly did, in a different way, for the religious authorities.

And what about you? During this Lenten Season I've invited you to think about your own story; your faith journey; your own experience of new life. I hope that you have been able to know where, in your life, there has been renewal; transformation; growth.

And as you think of those times, the next step is to consider just how that love that gave you new life – how has it changed things for you? Are you in the same place you were with God and with your relationships - or has that gift of love and grace changed your today's?

I had the joy of going to see the ballet that Allie Muenzer is in, titled The Story. It was wonderfully done and very moving. But there was one song about David, the shepherd, the king, written by Chris Tomlin, titled, "Your Heart," that really spoke to me. It was about truly giving the Lord our heart. It moved me to tears.

In the song, David is saying:

It never was about the oil dripping from my head  
 I never did dream beyond the pastures I could tend  
 It never was about the praise, not about the street parade  
 I didn't really need a crowd when Goliath fell down

I never meant to woo a king with simple shepherd songs  
 Or hide away inside a cave, safe from danger's arms  
 I never meant to wear a crown or try to bring armies down  
 It never was about me and who I hoped to be

At the end of the day I wanna hear people say  
My heart looks like Your heart,  
When the world looks at me, let them agree  
That my heart looks like Your heart.

I sometimes forget, in all my busy life, that my goal is to have my heart to look like the heart of Jesus. That what I do isn't about me and how I look, but about Him and how he is ... full of grace and love; constantly forgiving, and renewing, and transforming.

Doesn't his grace and love change each of your todays? Wouldn't you love to be able to let go of inhibitions about how you look when you are truly expressing your love for the Savior?

This love changes everything. This love changes each today. May our hearts look like his heart. May our love be molded into the same shape as his love; our love for him; our love for each other.

If not for grace, if not for his love ... where would you be right now? I started off by saying that Jesus' death is a paradox. It's true, really. Because of his death, we have new life; we have that grace. We are all forgiven and made new.

If you can't think of any other thing in your life that is part of your story – that is a new life story – think on that! Jesus Christ died to give you life! Thanks be to God.

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