

March 13, 2016

Fifth Sunday on the Lenten Journey

Isaiah 43: 16a, 18, 19a

What creative new thing is **God** up to in your Life this Lent?

What are you seeing and wanting to respond to differently.

Let's let our responsive reading help us with this question:

Creating Something Brand-New:

If we want others to be more loving,

I choose to love first.

If we notice other people's irritability,

I let go of my own.

If we find ourselves resenting the faults of others,

I face my own and forgive.

If the world seems desperate,

I let go of my own despair.

If we want a just world,

I start being just in small ways myself.

If we want the world to change,

I will be the change.

If we want to find God,

I honour God within myself

and I will always see God beyond myself.

Richard Rohr, altered a lot

John 12: 1-8 Extravagance

We all have our own calculus for deciding how we spend our hard earned money. We cheap out on certain things and go extravagant on other stuff. We all have our priorities, our penny pinching and our allowed luxuries. But, have you noticed that we also have an opinion on how other people should spend their money? We are flabbergasted at extreme examples of conspicuous consumption. From time to time I watch the “Antique Roadshow” and find it amazing how much collectors will pay for the strangest things or absolutely useless items.

Each generation has their own idiosyncrasies about spending money. The “*waste not, want not*” approach can be acted out in so many different ways. When I was a kid “*waste not, want not*” meant hand-me-down clothing from my older brother. To my kids it means reuse, reduce, recycle, re-gift and compost. And yet, somewhere in between we all participate in the throw away culture of consumerism.

Let me tell you, when a grandchild arrives what’s a necessity and what’s a luxury reaches new heights of confusion and extravagance!

Let’s get back to today’s story. As conscientious United Church folk, we probably wouldn’t have broken open an expensive perfume bottle over **Jesus**’ feet, at Lazarus’ house. If it wasn’t Judas making all the fuss, we would be right in there voicing the complaint. Our Protestant, Calvinist, Presbyterian roots would be screaming. After all, 300 silver coins were an entire year’s wage for a peasant labourer. Minimum wage today would be about \$15,000, but a fairer comparison would be around half that. Now to put this in perspective a rare bottle of seriously aged scotch or cognac can fetch over \$30,000.

Fortunately, **Jesus** wasn’t influenced by the Reformation or John Calvin and saw things differently. So did **Mary**. Something more than money was going on here.

Remember **Jesus**, had recently released **Mary**’s brother **Lazarus** from the tomb and is visiting for the first time since. At the beginning of the story Lazarus is named twice so the recent experience of death and dying is front and centre. Take note, these

folks are not poor starving peasants. They may just be the affluent Westmounters or West Islanders of their day. But, where would an unmarried woman like **Mary** be without her brother and the family's resources attached to him. **Mary** is filled to overflowing with *gratitude*.

So, look what happens when *gratitude* and *generosity* come together. **Mary** sees all too clearly where **Jesus**' ministry is taking him. She sees the price that will be demanded and the price he will have to pay. After experiencing her brother's death first hand only a week or so ago, in her *gratitude* and in her *generosity* **Mary** breaks open a priceless perfume to anoint his feet for burial. Her whole hearted vulnerability finds expression in a recklessly beautiful act. Although a week premature, the scent in her hair will remain with her throughout Holy Week and beyond.

Remember a time when you were beyond thankful: when it seemed like your life was unexpectedly given back to you. A child rescued: An offence forgiven: An illness overcome: Love or friendship returned: Divine inspiration received. Remember how the **Spirit** working through others, lifted you up from a dark place, or carried you through a difficult time, drawing forth your, *gratitude* and *generosity*. Remember nearly jumping out of your skin, because words and welcome just couldn't communicate how you felt. Remember how it was absolutely impossible to be cheap or miserly in that moment. Remember the aliveness of it, the fullness, the extravagance of it all.

Friends, we know that *gratitude and generosity* poured out together bless our relationships with the priceless perfume of compassion, and it stays with us long after the event. We know this extravagance is the new thing **God** is doing, the new life of **Christ** flowing through us.

Gratitude steeped in **generosity** connects us to **God's uncontrolling love** which always opens up new beginnings.

Generosity infused with **gratitude**, pours out as **uncontrolling love** offering the possibility of resurrection.

Application for Today

Let's get extravagant.

Let's tap into **God's uncontrolling love** through our **gratitude and generosity** as we approach Holy Week.

Hymn #684 Make Me a Channel of Your Peace.