

Extravagant Love

Some people believe the bible is a 'safe' book. They believe its purpose is to create people who lead 'safe' lives of predictable goodness and responsibility, where everything is wholesome and all the 'good people' follow the rules.

People who believe that must have never read this story.

Because this is not a 'safe' story at all. It is wild, untamed, provocative account of someone who breaks a list of rules that shocks even the 'not-so-good' people. This is not one of those stories that makes you say "Aww that was nice". It's one of those stories that makes you say "What the heck is going on here?"

A woman named Mary comes up to Jesus and not only touches him, but touches his bare feet and wipes them with her hair. That by itself is scandalous enough - since even a married couple would never have had such a public display of affection in the first century. But that's not even the part the text from today is overly concerned about.

The really 'unsafe' thing, -the irrational and frankly reckless thing that turns the stomach of frugal Midwesterners - is that Mary wasn't rubbing Jesus' feet with Suave-brand baby lotion. She was using \$1000/ounce imported perfume! That's not just wasteful. That's down right offensive. Even though Judas is labeled as a thief, I'm betting most of us would agree with his objections.

Why would anyone do such a thing? And why was this event recorded in John's gospel for all the world to read? Couldn't we have done without it? I mean, it might give people the idea that following Jesus includes a notion of foolishness.

And that's why this is a dangerous story. It's one of the few that occurs in one form or another in all four gospel accounts and that means "no" we can't do without it - because it communicates something essential about the nature of Jesus - and about the effect he has on those he encounters.

Here is what I think that essential thing is:

**love must have the capacity for irrational extravagance
for love to be love, it can't make any sense.**

What Mary does for Jesus definitely doesn't seem to make any sense but it does show, with unrestrained clarity, the depth of her love for the man who raised her brother from the dead. And more than that, Mary's sacrificial actions point to the upcoming death of Jesus on the cross, who poured out his very life for the sake of the world.

That kind of extravagance doesn't make any sense either but I think Mary helps us understand that Jesus died for us - not so much to pay a penalty for our sins- as to **show us how much we are loved.**

Back when we had debtors prisons, where people would languish for years until they sold enough of their goods (or their family) to pay off what they owed, it may have been helpful to think about Jesus as a kind of "heavenly currency" that pays off the debt our sins have built up with a righteous God.

But perhaps today we need to recapture Mary's understanding that the death of Jesus is an **extravagant demonstration** of just how much we are loved and valued and cared for by God. Perhaps we need to rediscover that the heart of God is not filled with demands for satisfaction but rather with irrational and unexpected extravagance!

Because if you think a woman rubbing \$1000 oz perfume on the feet of Jesus is extravagant, how would you describe a king who washes the dirty feet of his disciples? Or what would you say about the Son of God emptying himself of all the titles, all the safety, all the security of divinity and becoming vulnerable to death, even the worst kind of death, the humiliating death of a convicted criminal, the unrighteous death of a heretic!

That is how we know God loves us. Jesus died for us! He didn't have to. God could have written up a nice little note that spelled out a solution for sin. But love would have none of that. Love gives with unexpected and irrational extravagance because that is the only way people really understand how much they matter.

That kind of extravagance is meant for us. It is meant to save us, to humble us, to convict us of our own self-righteousness excuses, and to create in us something new - A value and a worth beyond anything we can manufacture for ourselves.

And from that newfound sense of being loved, we are free and empowered with the **capacity to be irrationally extravagant towards others**. It is how God fills the whole room with the fragrance of grace.

Which means we aren't always safe or sensible, because sometime "sensible" is just an excuse to be selfish. As Christians we communicate the nature of God's love for us by sometimes being unexpectedly and irrationally extravagant. Not only with the value we place on dollar bills but also with our time, our abilities, and our very lives.

How do people show others they care about them?

Flowers from husbands (or maybe new Cattle waters from wives...that's a personal story). And not just monetary things either.

Mary gave of her reputation.

Standing with people who on the "outside". Unexpected phone calls, cards.

Smiles on hard days. Patience in anxious situations... not all the time but you've got to have the capacity for it. The "other" has go to know you are capable of it. And if we are followers of Jesus, that "other" is not somebody who can pay you back but undeserving people who can do nothing other than **pay forward** the extravagance they experience.

And just like that, the whole room, the whole world, is filled with the fragrance of grace. It is the sweet delight that can only come from the love of Jesus. It is hope for LIFE that begins now and never ends. It is courage to listen to unsafe stories because through them God helps us to risk loving like Jesus, and that capacity for extravagance is what births JOY .