

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 7, 2019

Litany

Based on Psalm 126

When we found our lives restored it was like a dream;
we could laugh again and find joy in our days and nights.

God has done great things in our midst.

Those who sow the seeds of mourning will reap the harvest of healing.

Let us pray:

**We wait for the miracle of your harvest,
Spirit of life, when your song shall once again be in our mouths. Amen.**

The Scripture

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

The Message

Enough: No One Goes Hungry and No One Gets Lost

Nick Larson

I want to start today with a question. It is a rhetorical question, one that I don't really need you all to answer right now, but I do want you to have an answer.

The question is this: When was the last time you were truly amazed? That you felt that deep sense of wonder? When you were overwhelmed with the feeling that this moment is enough. That feeling when change comes into a room, when something that wasn't there before, is now palpably present. Those are turning points.

Our story today is one of those turning points. We are at the halfway mark of the gospel of John, and John wants you, as the reader of his gospel, to know the story turns when he begins to tell the story of Jesus' final week. The raising of Lazarus from the dead was for John, Jesus' final sign and wonder, and now we, as readers, have crossed over into the second-half of John.

This passage is the turning point from where Jesus is done displaying all the signs and wonders in healing, feeding, and caring for people. He has lavishly poured out his love upon the world in tangible and individual circumstance and situations. John chooses Mary and her extravagance as that turning point.

As individuals we reach turning points in our lives, too.

As a congregation, we have turned the corner and are going to be approaching Holy Week. Our baptismal candidates are going to stand right here next week and lead us in a proclamation of faith. You know we are about turn a corner, because you likely got our stewardship pledge letter in the mail this week. You've seen the large hot-air balloon basket in the narthex, and we have kicked off our *Soaring* campaign inviting each of you to join in offering what you have to God. Even our school-age children have felt the turning point come in the warmer days and recess on the playground again.

In our lives, we reach turning points. We are presented with choices and opportunities, and we can decide what to do with them. John is subtly, or perhaps not so subtly, inviting us into his narrative to decide for ourselves what kind of God we know and worship. What kind of person this Jesus is really; and what we are supposed to do in response.

It may seem like acknowledging the obvious, but it is not. It's something more. Sometimes you are presented with a choice and you get to decide what to do with it.

The parable that Terry so eloquently guided us through last week, on the lost son or the prodigal son showcased the excessive spending of a young man and the excessive love of a father. In this story, Mary continues the theme of excessiveness in the form of a costly gesture involving expensive ointment. Generally, we think of Lent as a season of deprivation rather than excessiveness, but these texts and our God really speaks of generosity.

In our story today, generosity is the point. Mary invites us each to consider what it would mean to give away, to pour out, and use something we treasure, in this case a year's worth of wages, to impractically act.

What does it mean to give of yourself so fully to the sense of wonder being present to the divine turned tangible?

Mary is recognizing here that in his living, Jesus needs to be honored, he needed to be celebrated not after he was gone, but when he was still alive. This story reeks of the simultaneous smell of life and death. She challenges each of us with the act, typically reserved for the dead, by offering it to the one who is still living.

It's difficult to justify Mary's actions on practical grounds. Cleary Judas agrees.

In her defense, however, it is clear that Mary's love for Jesus echoes, in a small but significant way, the lavish impracticality of Jesus' own love for the world.

She was anointing Jesus for his burial, marking him for death, and while her behavior may have seemed strange to those standing around, it was no more strange than that of the prophets who went before her – Ezekiel eating the scroll of the Lord as a sign that he carried the word of God around inside of him (Ezekiel 2), or Jeremiah smashing the clay jar to show God's judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 19), or Isaiah walking around naked and barefoot as an oracle against the nations (Isaiah 20). Prophets do things like that. They act out. They act out the truth that no one else can see, and those standing around either write them off as nuts or fall silent in wonder (Barbara Brown Taylor).

John, through Mary, is telling us that the story is going to go a different way than we might expect, that even with the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the die has been cast, there will be no more dialogue, no more discussions, no more signs and wonders.

All the major players of the story have set themselves on a collision course that apparently cannot be altered, or at least one from which they all refuse to turn back. Divine inevitability requires human collaboration to reach fulfillment.

Mary's example invites us to reflect on what genuine discipleship feels like. So much of contemporary discipleship is measured, practically weighed down by a sense of duty, obligation, and coloring within the lines.

What would happen if Christians let down their guard enough to celebrate like Mary? To give themselves collectively to moments of wonder?

Mary has this innate ability to see the ordinary moments of Jesus' life and experience that sense of wonder. That sense of waking up and seeing things the way you saw them before they became ordinary.

Mary walking into that room with the jar in her hands is seeing Jesus in a different way; she's seeking to connect with him skin to skin – building connection with her friend and savior Jesus.

This week, I discovered the book by a magician named Nate Staniforth. In his book he shares the story of meeting his hero, a magician named David Berglas. David Berglas was, apparently, the Houdini of the past 100-years. He once made a grand piano disappear in a room where dinner guests surrounded it. Let me tell you; after hearing about him I went down quite the Internet rabbit hole continually being amazed by his work.

Nate talks about how Berglas managed to create and perform magic that even the best magicians in the world couldn't explain. Nate fell in love with his work by reading Berglas' book when he was in college. Anyways, Nate tells this story of meeting his hero, of going to London to visit with him to ask him a few questions.

Picture it if you will. Nate, a young successful magician in his own right, meeting his hero, walking up to the front door of his house in London. Think about what it would feel like to ring the door bell and accept an invitation to sit with your hero. I want to read you just a bit out of Nate's book, *Here is Real Magic*.

"Nate," David Berglas said before he opened the door to his dining room, where we would spend the next five-hours talking about magic. "You're married, aren't you?" "I am." "What is your wife's name?" "Katherine" "Very good," he said.

"And of course, you would know if she has a favorite flower." "She does; peonies."

Something happened then, and I'm not quite sure exactly what. Something shifted. He looked me directly in the eye, and even before he opened the door, I understood why he was the greatest magician in the world.

He had moved slowly as we walked down the hall. But now he was doing magic. He stood straight filled with energy, and his words carried a weight that I have never been able to replicate. "Let's sit in here" he said. As he opened the door to the dining room, inside I saw a large mahogany table with a vase at the very center. The vase was filled with peonies.

"I love this room, because of it offers such a beautiful view of the garden." As he crossed the room and pulled back the curtains revealing a garden full, filled with peonies. Two rows of lush green bushes covered with white blooms. I felt my knees go weak, and I sat down quickly in one of the chairs.

I have seen great magic performed by great magicians all over the world, but I had never felt like this before. This magic felt real. He sat down across from me, folding his hands in front of him. "I hope you'll tell Katherine about the flowers and give her my regards."

That was in 2013, and Nate reports thinking about that day every day since. Sometimes, in life, there are just moments that you remember, that take on special significance. Nate talked about how to this day, he has no idea how Berglas pulled it off. This magician didn't know Nate's wife who was in Iowa, and they were in London, and he's asking Nate about his wife's favorite flowers, and then he shows him a vase and a garden full of them.

The rest of the story goes like this. After Nate spent five-hours at the Berglas residence, and he went back to his hotel and sat at the bar for a while writing down everything, they talked about not wanting to forget the evening. Because one of the things with magic is that it's easy to misremember the details, and Nate wanted this night etched in his memory. So, then he called Katherine to tell her about his night, about this incredible thing. She said "Nate, that's impossible." "Of course, I know." He said to her. "No, you don't understand, this is October and peonies only ever bloom in May."

Sometimes, a moment, can reach deep inside a person and offer something with hope that speaks to that deeper experience inside of each of us. Sometimes wonder and awe can make our hearts leap and our joy soar.

Mary here, in this story, offers those gathered, and us, a new way of seeing the world. She doesn't do what is expected of her and anoint Jesus on the head. No, she steps into the room and chooses to anoint his feet. To ground him to this place and time, to recognize that there is something about the very human nature of this human one. That there is something about him that threatens to unseat whatever insulation that we managed to erect for ourselves. Whether that is cynicism, nihilism, escapism.

If we let it, life can rob us from all wonder and awe. We can become like Judas, in this passage, hardened against the world. It is not that Judas doesn't want Jesus to be the Messiah, the one that was promised. In fact, I think he wanted it so badly, as we do, and yet he had already decided that it is not out there. Jesus can't possibly be him.

Yet, Judas, like we are sometimes, was just looking the wrong way. Mary saw clearly who this man from Galilee was, and she took her chance and offered what she had to celebrate with him while he was there in her house, sitting across the table from her brother, the very one he had brought back to life, not a few short stories ago.

And she invites us, each of us, each in our own way, to be stewards of what God has already blessed us with. You have your pound of pure nard. You already possess the gift. You are already enough, exactly as you sit here today. Each of us can be satisfied, and no one is irrevocably lost.

With Jesus, you are already enough.

The bottle is not to be held back or kept or admired. It's made to be used. You are God's bottle, ready to be used to anoint others, just as Jesus was God's gift to the world, to be raised up, to be poured out for the life of the world.

Mary found herself and gave it away by anointing him as the Savior who would die and yet lives.

Will you?