

Sermon Text for February 18, 2018

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Judges 4:17-22, Mark 14:3-9

“Valuing the presence of Jesus”

Historically Lent is a time of reflection, meditation, spiritual disciplines. It is during this time that we gauge our spiritual health and hope to improve it as we move through the weeks. Today fasting means something very different than it did in the Old Testament and then again something very different even in Jesus' day. But these disciplines, prayer, Scriptures reading, fasting, good works, help us to be, well, disciplined.

The purpose of Lent is to turn our eyes upon Jesus, to look full in his wonderful face, then the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. You've heard that before. This year we will learn to value the presence of Jesus through a spiritual discipline that may not apply to all of you. Throughout my years here I have encouraged you in lent to follow spiritual disciplines. My first year here I encourage you to fast. I'm guessing that some of you did, but probably most of you did not. I've encouraged you to read Scripture, to pray, and I'm guessing that some of you have done these disciplines and I'm guessing that if you did, you were enriched by it and your relationship with Jesus was improved.

This year it may not apply to all of you, for to those that it does apply, I hope you take me up on it. We are going to be having a device free lent. I have started doing it since Ash Wednesday and I am telling it has been transformative. You do not use your cell phone for anything except phone calls, texts, crucial apps like the Bible app or if you have a devotional app that you follow. But no more Facebook on your phone, or Instagram on your phone, or twitter, or your news apps either CNN or FOX, no games on your cell phone. If you need to get on Facebook then you have to use your computer. If you want to follow the news, then get on your computer. If you have to check your email, then get on your computer.

Get home and put it in a basket, not just for dinner, but for the whole time that you are home. There is nothing evil about the cell phone. It is a tool, so we need to use it for that, but we don't use it to suck up all of our valuable time. The value that we place in the phone is way out of kilter and way out of wack. If you follow a device free lent, you will thank me come April Fools Day.

The woman in our second Scripture valued Jesus more than anything. She was scolded, called reckless, wasteful, and insignificant. When we value Jesus over all things, then our focus on our family becomes clearer, our focus on daily events and common occurrences become stronger.. I need to share that over last few weeks since I started running again, I just feel better,

I feel more focused, I feel like I can serve you better. And now with device free lent, wow, things are just coming together. Let's see how we can value the presence of Jesus better.

READ SCRIPTURE

Every now and then the Old Testament Scripture is a bit of a puzzle. This week it is one of those that I chose months ago and as we looked at it with the creative worship team I was stumped as to why I chose it. We have learned before Lent that we are called to do our job. Jael certainly did her job, but I'm pretty sure that's not why I chose it. Sisera's plan was certainly not the plan that God had in mind and Jael worked behind the scenes to ensure that Barak received his prize of a dead Sisera. This story is tucked in there with my favorite judge, Deborah. Barak was her general and here we find another strong woman who is a clear protagonist. Maybe that is why I chose it, a strong protagonist who is a woman who shines above the men.

Jesus is blessed by a woman who valued him above all things. This woman sends us on our Lenten journey this year as Jesus says that her story will be proclaimed every place where the Gospel is preached. So let's hear about her and her interaction with Jesus and how it can help us to value Jesus.

When we get to vs.3 we really see the entire story laid out before us. In some ways, we only need to read vs.3, but the rest of it is important as well. So let's look at vs.3. Jesus is in the house of a leper to begin our Scripture. Simon the leper, to be precise. Does that mean anything to you. Do you know anything about lepers in Jesus' day? Remember they were cast out of the town and not able to interact with people, and here Jesus is spending time in the house of Simon the leper.

I guess it makes sense since on Wednesday we saw the religious leaders behind the scenes plotting to arrest and kill Jesus. You can go to vs.1-2 in chapter 14 of Mark if you want to check up on me. So what better place to be out of the limelight and not be noticed by anyone than if we have a meal at a leper's house. Yes, he was probably clean by now, but do you know what kind of a toll your social pedigree takes when you get leprosy in the 1st century. It isn't good. So that's where Jesus is, at the house of an outcast. I love my Jesus. It almost seems like he comes full circle here in the Gospel of Mark. Look at one of Jesus' first miracles. Turn to Mark 1:41 where we see that he heals a leper and that leper becomes his biggest fan. It probably wasn't the same person because one was in Galilee and the other in Bethany, but these are the people Jesus chooses to spend time with. Let's get back to the woman with the nard.

Back to vs.3 and we see the whole scenario play out before us. This woman comes to where Jesus is eating and breaks a jar of costly ointment and pours it over Jesus' head as a sign of ultimate respect. We see a similar scene take place in the other Gospels. John says it was a

Mary of Bethany, Luke calls her a sinful woman and so we have over time made her into Mary Magdalene who is said to have been a prostitute.

But as you would expect, I think she is someone else. I think she is a wealthy woman who simply valued the presence of Jesus. We know that there were women who were supporting his ministry and Luke 8 tells us that they were financially supporting his ministry. We read in vs.5 that the ointment was worth a whole year's salary for a worker. That is one expensive jar of perfume. So what does it matter if she is Mary of Bethany, or a prostitute, or a wealthy socialite? Who had the most to lose from what she did? I would argue the latter.

She focused on Jesus, while the others in the room, as we read through this passage, focused on the money. Read through this Scripture and we read that immediately after she performs this incredibly intimate act the men in the story complain. You are wasting this money on Jesus. Why don't you give it to the poor. Now, they are somewhat justified by this proclamation. They were just repeating what they had learned from Jesus. Go to chapter 10:21 and we find Jesus teaching us a lesson through a rich young man telling him that he needs to sell all that he has and give it to the poor. They were just coming off this lesson, so it has to apply here as well, to this woman. We read that the men in that room scolded her for wasting that jar of oil on Jesus.

It does remind me a bit of another group of men who bring a woman out to a square wanting blood. Here they scold her, there they can't wait to stone her. Jesus' role in both of these stories is liberating and he uplifts them both in a significant transformative way. So does valuing Jesus as this woman does, ever put us in a position where there is a competition between valuing Jesus and valuing the poor? Jesus says you will not always have me with you. This church has shown time after time that we do not have to sacrifice our giving to the poor, our mission giving, in order to focus on the presence of Jesus in our midst.

There is a tension in churches sometimes between what is used financially locally and what is used to support mission and ministry that is sometimes considered not necessary. What she did was certainly not considered necessary by those in the room. It was considered wasteful. Sending a group of high schoolers to Italy to teach VBS could be seen as wasteful, not necessary. Money wasted on youth when they can do mission here.

Time with our youth is never wasted. In light of the shooting in a Florida high school I hope no one ever questions why we emphasize so much spending time and making promises and pouring ourselves completely into the lives of these children and these youth. Part of the reason why we exist as a church is so that the children will come unto me and find a family that will rally and encourage and lead them to Jesus. But we don't have to choose between supporting our

youth and being committed to mission. Last Sunday we raised over \$8,000 for blanket Sunday. So Saturday we had the auction and Sunday we had blanket Sunday. That's incredible and once again shows that we can value the presence of Jesus without having to choose. When you value Jesus then things become clearer.

During lent when we value Jesus and spend the time that we need to value him in our lives, you will see things start to come back into focus. Boy, doesn't that sound good right about now? Our marriages become better when we focus on Jesus, because we remember that he told us to be servants. We enjoy life more because we remember the joy that he wants us to have. Our kids see you happy and they are affected. When we value Jesus there are not competing demands, but a world of possibilities opens up.

After the shooting in Florida some of you have talked to me about the need for the church to be proactive in the area of mental health. We are going to brainstorm about what we can do as a church to help those who struggle with mental health and their families. We often sluff that issue off to others because we say that the church simply is not equipped to handle it. Well, what would it take to make this church equipped. How do we value Jesus in such a way that we are able to discover opportunities where he would send us on our way.

I want to end with what Jesus says about what this woman did for him. It is precious his perspective on it. In the Old Testament when someone was anointed it was usually done by a prophet who anointed the incoming king. But here Jesus says that it was for his burial, that she was preparing him for his burial. The words that he chooses to use is that what she has done for me is a beautiful thing. Your Bible isn't going to say that, the NRSV states a good service but the word in Greek is kalos. Kalos can mean good, morally good, or beautiful, aesthetically pleasing. But in this Scripture it means more than either of those things. The beauty of her extravagant and apparently wasteful gesture is due to her particular situation. Jesus is about to die. She valued Jesus in this beautiful way.

Her deed springs from a personal love for Jesus which, on occasion, breaks all patterns, defines common sense, and simply gives. Spontaneous, uncalculating, selfless, and timely. Her gift calls us to love Jesus in this way too and not to judge the way others express their love for him. Value Jesus this Lent, in a way that you never have before.