Title: Where is your heart?

Text: John 12.1-8

Theme: How do you respond to Jesus?

Series: Palm Sunday 2023

Prop Stmnt: How you respond to Jesus reveals the condition of your heart.

Have you ever been misunderstood? Have you ever done something when people did not grasp your true intentions? Some people want to be misunderstood. They do things in order to make much of themselves. They want to be thought of differently than what they really are. Such is the sad story of Judas Iscariot. He was misunderstood because he wanted to be misunderstood. He wanted to sound pious to throw people off the trail of his putrid hypocrisy. He pretended to be a giver when he was actually a taker. Jesus could have exposed him all along, but chose not to. What smoked him out was Mary. Judas completely misunderstood Mary because Judas had no capacity to understand her heart, so he attacked it. 1,000 years earlier it was Michal who accused David of being a fraud. Now, it is Judas accusing Mary of being a fool. Like Michal, Judas was amazingly close to the glory of God and like Michal, he couldn’t see it.

Read Text:

This message has 2 points. The first one is 90% of the sermon, but the second, while short, is needful. John’s gospel tells us that this event took place on the night before the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Matthew and Mark also include this, but they give it as the back story for Judas’ betrayal. I will be drawing on all 3 accounts for details, but primarily on John this morning.

This was an amazing event! Simon, the leper is hosting Jesus and his disciples along with Lazarus for a dinner in his home. Obviously, Simon had been healed of his leprosy in order to do this. This means that there were at least 15 men who were eating dinner here in Simon’s home. We eat dinner seated around a table. If it takes longer than 20-30 minutes, we get squirrely. But they ate dinner lying down on the outside of U-shaped table making it very comfortable, very relaxing and very convenient for those serving. In this case, Martha was happily involved. Bethany was a village. Everyone knew everyone and everyone knew that Simon had leprosy and was now healed. If Simon had a room large enough for this event, he was likely a man of means. As a leper he would have been separated from his family, his village and his home. Now, for him to be able to enjoy all of this was just beautiful. To get back something or someone that you feared was lost forever creates a thanksgiving that has no end. Apart from Jesus, there was no cure for leprosy. That was a death sentence. What a picture of the gospel. Simon, as good as dead, had been living in the lepers’ colony and was now at home with Jesus.

You could hear his story. “I was as a good as dead when I was healed.” It would have been the story of the night to revel in except, Lazarus was there. “You were as good as dead, I WAS dead!” But even Lazarus was not the hero of the dinner. The guest of honor was Christ. What an incredible dinner! The stories, the laughter, the impressions, perspectives and sharing accounts of the stories and buzz had to have been exhilarating. While the text says that Martha served, it is likely that her sister Mary had been involved in serving as well. The disciples did not eat like this too often. There were times, but these were special and this night was even more so. Then, something happened. What happened exposed the hearts of two people who are set before us.

1. **Jesus reveals your heart**.
   1. **Blind to grace or humbled by grace**

Mary came back into the room, but not serve food. In a moment, the conversations would soften as the attention of the men was drawn to what she was doing. Make no mistake, what she was doing was not simply out of the ordinary, it was shocking. In those days, the men did not usually eat with the women. When the women served, they quietly went about their serving in order to not make themselves the focus of the dinner. So, for Mary to come into the room without food or beverage was strange, but what she did was stunning. It was so stunning that this story is in 3 of the gospels and has been told millions of times for almost 2,000 years. It was stunning in the sense that it broke social norms. Can you imagine the risk that Mary took? Mary not only poured out this ointment, she let down her hair so she could use it to wipe the excess from the feet of Christ. In that culture, women only let their hair down in the privacy of their home and for their husbands. A woman who let her hair down was considered to be a prostitute. Mary had spent a lot of time with these men. These were friends and fellow disciples. She was about to do something shocking. Would they understand? Would they reject her? Would this cause her to be an outcast? Her fears were justified. In their eyes, she had crossed the line. In Matthew’s account we are told that Mary is troubled by what they say. Mark says that they scolded her. Why would Mary take such a risk? In reality, what Mary did was not stunning at all. It was right. It was a right response to Jesus. Mary realized who Jesus was. Mary believed Jesus. Mary experienced the grace and power of Jesus. Therefore, all that Mary was doing was responding in proportion to what she had experienced. Mary was humbled by the grace of God poured out upon her and her family.

Think of it. Of all the families in Israel to befriend, Jesus chose hers. Of all the people who died, Christ chose to raise Lazarus, her brother from the dead. Weren’t there others? Jesus didn’t raise all of them back to life. What had Martha and Mary done to deserve this? Why did Jesus give them such special attention? The answer to that is no different than why you and I are here today and not somewhere else with no affections for Christ, the gospel and his church. Why do you give attention to God? Why has God revealed his gospel to you? Why do you even know about Jesus? Why do you have a Bible in your own language and for many of you, the ability to read and understand it? The sovereignty of God demonstrated in the free grace of God to us gives us a foundation and frame for a heart for God. God’s grace, rightfully seen, humbles us. But just because grace is set on display does not mean everyone who sees it, sees it. Mary was humbled by grace and Judas was blind to it.

What is your response to the grace of Christ? Do you believe in Christ and have trusted him for the forgiveness of your sin? Are you amazed at his grace and humbled that he would die for a sinner such as you? Or, does he mean nothing to you? Is it just a story? Mary or Judas?

* 1. **Demeaning of others or awed by Christ**

Mary was overwhelmed by the grace of God, therefore, there was no response on her part that was too big. Mary’s response was a response of awe. But Mary’s sacrificial, humble, generous, extravagant, deeply personal response made a lot of people, like Judas Iscariot, uncomfortable. The fact that Judas was not awed by Christ was revealed in how demeaning and dismissive he was of Mary. Judas led the attack on Mary. What a waste! You just wasted a very expensive ointment! Look at all of the good that you have done. Judas accused Mary of being a fool, when Judas was the fool. Judas pretended to be concerned about the needs of the poor, when he was in reality concerned about himself and making himself look good. The other disciples joined him in his attacks on Mary. They did not understand Mary because they did not understand Jesus. Make no mistake. The attack on Mary was an attack on Christ. No one is neutral about Christ. Jesus reveals your true heart. While the religious leaders were plotting to kill Jesus and rid themselves of him, Mary was anointing him. But it wasn’t just the religious leaders, was it? The disciples don’t get it. Mary anoints the body of Jesus with this perfume. John focuses upon the part where she anointed his feet because in the very next chapter, what happens? Jesus washes the feet of the disciples. He washes their feet because they refused to wash his.

When we are awed by Christ, we are not in awe of ourselves. But when we are not in awe of Christ we are threatened by others, especially when what they are exposes what we aren’t. Do you find yourself constantly finding fault with others? Do you focus on the weaknesses of others in such a way that you feel better about yourself? The ground is level at the foot of the cross, but if I am not at the foot of the cross and seeing what I really am who Christ really is and what Christ has done, then I am trying to find something that makes much of me. Beloved, I want you to know the truth. I want you to anchor your life to the truth and stand for the truth and live for the truth. But, standing for the truth does not make much of you. Believing right things and seeking to live them out does not give you cause to look down at others and cultivate a critical spirit. There is a vast difference between humble discernment and prideful criticism. Judas thought he was being discerning. He thought he knew more than Mary and even more than Christ. But, he didn’t. He couldn’t see what Mary was doing because Judas was already blinded by his own sin.

What about you? Do you demean others in your heart or does your awe of Christ humble you and make you aware that you are no better than anyone else? Judas or Mary?

* 1. **Using Jesus or being used up for Jesus** (6)

Judas was in charge of the money. Judas was in a position of trust. Judas took advantage of his position of trust to line his own pockets. The money was used to provide for the needs of the disciples (food, etc), but it was probably used to give alms to the poor. Judas didn’t care about the poor. He was already stealing. We do not know when he first decided to do this. We just know that he did. One little sin of taking what did not belong to him, made it easier to do it again, then again, then again. This will be my last time. I will pay it back. I’ll make it up. Anyone who knows me, knows that I am not really this kind of a person. These are all the lies we hear from public officials and employees caught in bribes and extortion. We recognize those excuses because they are the ones that we say to ourselves. That is what is scary about Judas. He is in all of us. It started with one lie, one act of thievery and what happened? His own sin blinded him to his own sin. John said that Judas was not concerned about the poor, but Judas may have believed he was. He may have thought that he was a good guy who had given up a lot to follow Jesus and was looking out for the poor because from time to time he was able to give them some money from the bag. Do you realize what Judas witnessed? Do you realize what he heard? But what he saw and heard never penetrated his heart. His heart was full of Judas, not Jesus. Therefore, Jesus became a means to his end. Jesus was his ticket to a good life. But Jesus did not go along with that and when Judas wasn’t getting his best life now, he decided that he was being let down. He wasn’t getting what he thought he deserved, so he took it.

Mary, on the other hand realized that she had been given something that she did not deserve, therefore she was willing to give. And that, beloved is at the heart of our hearts. I could ask the question, are you a taker or a giver? I could challenge you to be a better giver and be less of taker, but that isn’t the heart of it. I am a taker (and a stingy keeper) when I think that I deserve more than what I have. I am a giver when I realize that I have been given way more than what I deserve. What about you? Taker or giver? Judas or Mary?

* 1. **Private Sin or Public Confession**

Judas covered (or distracted attention away from) his private sin with a public rebuke of Mary. Mary exposed her personal need with a public confession of her love for Christ. Have you ever said, “Hey, this is not about me, I just don’t want to see someone else getting hurt.”? That may be true, but it may be a cover-up. Look at the arrows of the words and actions. Judas is heaping accusations on Mary while collecting the adulation and affirmation of the others. Mary is heaping worship and affection on Christ while reaping ridicule and humility. Judas lied because he cared about himself and what others thought of him. He was divisive, in that he was trying to turn the disciples against Christ. He was demeaning of Mary and attempted to destroy her by scolding her act of love and worship. He was demanding that his view be accepted and followed. And he was deceitful because it made him look noble and magnanimous. His sin was private, but it expressed itself in such a hateful way. Again, Matthew’s account made it clear that Jesus knew that Mary was troubled by what he said. Mark says that they scolded her.

Mary, on other hand, is not recorded to have said anything. She did not defend herself. When you look at the entire setting, I get the sense that she cared about Christ, above all. She was willing to be misunderstood, even ridiculed. But Christ was her Lord, her Savior, her God, and that is all that mattered. She was making a very public confession of her complete devotion to Christ. Christ is worth extravagant praise, extravagant worship, and heart-driven generosity. Following Christ will give you a really big heart and really tender one as well.

What about you? Do you cover your sin, make excuses for it, seek to distract others from it, pretend even to yourself that it is not there? Or, is your need and your trust in Christ, like an open book whose story can be read? Judas or Mary?

* 1. **Small heart or big heart**

A small heart is a hard heart. A small heart does not care about the feelings of others. Judas couldn’t care less that in this moment of deep personal risk and sacrifice, that he stepped on Mary’s heart and tried to crush it. Mary, on the other hand loved Christ so much that she didn’t care that she was pouring out about 12 ounces of pure nard in an ointment that was so valuable (likely from India) that it cost about a year’s salary. Take what you make in a year, buy a bottle of perfume from the high-end dealer in the Jerusalem and then pour it on Jesus all at once and then go and explain to your financial planner what you did. Want to make them go crazy? Tell them that if you could, you would do it again and again and again.

You did what? What good did that do? What benefit was there in that? Well, what practical good would it have been for Abraham to offer Isaac, for David to pour out the water on the ground, for Jeremiah to keep preaching when no one listened, for Hosea to love Gomer when she rejected him anyway? What good was it? The heart of a giver is not always practical. There it was. Perfume. She did what she was genuinely led to do, having no idea of the significance of it. But, she would. Reckless giving to Christ is never reckless. Radical trust, love and giving to Christ is actually reasonable when you realize who Jesus is and when you understand grace.

I have to look at my own heart and ask myself if I were in that room, what side would I lean toward? Here we are 2,000 years later and of course we applaud Mary and scorn Judas, but do we really? How many of us would be more comfortable with the restrained, measured, balanced and practical view of Judas while threatened by the impractical, reckless and extreme actions of Mary? Maybe Mary knows something that we don’t know.

1. **Jesus addresses your true heart**.

Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was aware of what Judas was doing and certainly knew therefore what Judas’ motive was in his biting criticism of her. Therefore, Jesus confronted Judas and the rest. He told them to leave her alone. At this point Judas had a choice to make. He could humble himself and receive the admonishment and confess his resentment, his deception and thievery. He didn’t. Sadly, tragically, he didn’t. (Matthew 26.14-15) “Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment, he sought an opportunity to betray him.” The admonishment of Jesus that exposed the heart of Judas did not bring about humility. Judas reacted with hatred. He had seen enough of the power of Christ that he should have realized that his plan was absurd. But sin causes brain damage. The blinding power of bitterness is so powerful that an otherwise rational person would betray the Son of God for 30 pieces of silver or around $270. Jesus confronted Judas, but Mary, he defended.

There are three things that Jesus said to them about Mary and in so doing, he said them to Mary. 1) She has done a beautiful thing. Think of the comfort and reassurance of that. The Creator who sees your heart defends your risky actions and says that what you have done is beautiful. There was a man in Louisiana who paid $10,000 for a painting at an estate sale because he thought that the painting was done by a student of Leonardo DaVinci. However, experts determined that the painting was by the master himself and the guy sold it for $75 million. That person later sold it at an auction for $450 million. Jesus looked at what Mary had done, and as the ultimate appraiser said that it was beautiful. That is all she needed to hear. 2) Jesus then said that what she had done was in preparation for his burial. Mary had no idea of the significance of her action. Jesus did. Mary had already seen one empty tomb. What she did was in anticipation of another. And 3) neither did she know the far-reaching influence of her costly sacrifice. Jesus said that “wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” Her extravagant “waste” was an eternal investment that continues to pay dividends.

Like Judas, those who do not know the grace of Christ do not the know what is truly valuable. Judas was dead to Christ, but alive to a world that hated Christ. He betrayed Christ for $260, and when he realized that he had been used, just like he tried to use Jesus, he hung himself. Mary, on the other hand was dead to this world, but alive to Christ. And we will never stop reveling in her sacrifice.

Jesus knows the sacrifices that you make. He knows the risk you take to believe him, love him, trust him, follow him even those others may condemn you. Others may condemn you; Jesus defends you. Jesus died for you. He will defend you and use your gifts in ways that we could never imagine. He is that strong and he is that kind.