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John 12:1-8

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Love Without Condition

Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out. There were many people who saw how Jesus raised Lazarus from death, so they believed in Jesus. But when the Pharisees and the chief priests heard about what Jesus did, they got angry and afraid, so they gathered together and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him!” Those Pharisees and the chief priests were afraid that if everyone believed in Jesus and followed him, nobody would listen to them, and they would lose their power and authority. So from that day on they made plans to put Jesus to death (John 11). This was the very time when they started to plan how to kill Jesus. **The time when Lazarus raised from death was also the time when the plan of killing Jesus began.**

Soon after that, Jesus came back to the place where he raised Lazarus from death, and they were eating together at the same table. On this table, there were Jesus, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, Jesus’s disciples, as well as those people who witnessed Lazarus came out from the tomb. We could imagine some of the conversations on this table. Jesus asked Lazarus about his physical condition, “How did your body feel? Was there any sign of feeling pain? How has been your eating? Is everything ok?” Mary and Martha must be very thankful for their brother’s life. Lazarus would have done anything to show his grateful heart to Jesus, who brought his life back again. At least he didn’t need to worry about the medical bills. Just as what we are wondering about the conversation on that table, those people who saw Jesus raised Lazarus from death also wanted to know. They gathered around the table at that place to see what’s next of this story.

While people’s eyes were looking at Jesus and Lazarus, Mary came out, with a pond of costly perfume made of pure nard, she anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair (12:3). The eyes now focused on Mary. People were surprised and maybe also confused. Because they never saw anyone used such expensive perfume in this way.

During Jesus's time, perfume or oil were used in many different ways: the priests would use it in the temple; it can also be used to anoint kings as a sign of blessing; girls would prepare costly perfume for their marriages; the perfume or oil can also apply for healings (which we still use as a way of healings today); people also used it to anoint the dead which shows respect and love. No matter which way people used the perfume for, they would never pour out a whole pound of perfume on someone's feet. One Roman pound was equal to about 11.5 ounces and is valued at about a laborer's one-year income. Think about an 11.5 ounces perfume, and I brought a bottle today so we can visibly see how much it is (this is my make up remover), 16 oz, used for a year. How about an 11.5 oz perfume? Probably we could use for much longer than a year. Mary just poured out that much of perfume onto Jesus's feet.

The next thing she did surprise all the eyes in that room again, she knelt down, used her hair to wipe Jesus's feet. At that time, a girl's hair is a sign of honor and glory; people's feet are the most unclean part of their body. **Mary was using the most honorable part of her body to wipe Jesus's feet.**

I used to think this image as a very weird and uncomfortable moment, but as time goes, the more I read this story, the more I can feel the deep love Mary had for Jesus. The grateful heart she had for Jesus because Jesus saved her brother's life. The longing heart she had for God's words when she sat still at Jesus's feet and listened to his teaching. **The humble heart she had for the preparation of what was coming for Jesus.** My preaching professor at Luther, Karoline Lewis wrote a beautiful line about this preparation, she wrote, "Mary loves Jesus into his future. I think Jesus took all of that love into the tomb, all of that love that would then love him into his future as the resurrection and the life."¹ When Judas questioned Mary, Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial." Jesus didn't stop Mary, for this preparation was from her heart, for Mary truly loved Jesus into his future.

¹ Karoline Lewis, *Working Preacher: Love Into Future*:
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=5309>

To love someone into their future is not an easy thing. Many times, there are expectations, hopes, or maybe disappointments. I remember when I first decided to come to Luther Seminary, my close friends and even my families, they asked, “Why do you want to go to a seminary? What kind of job can you find?” they all love me because they love me, they want me to have a better life, to be a better me. They love me into my future with worries and expectations.

When my boyfriend Bing first graduated from college, I asked him about his plan for the future, what kind of job he wants to do. I asked him (his major was Political Science), “so, what are you gonna do in the future? Are you sure you want to work for the government?” We often joke with each other’s about our majors: he is in political science, and I’m in theology. Both are very sensitive topics that people would avoid to talk. I love him, and I love him into his future. But this love has hope and expectation. I wish he could be in a better place, and I wish our life in the future is secured. **To love some into their future without any conditions is not an easy thing.**

In today’s Isaiah scripture, the Israelites were in Babylon, they were slaved and oppressed, and the Lord promised to them, “I am about to do a new thing; I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (43:19) **God loves God’s people into their future without any conditions, a future of life and freedom.** When Mary poured out the perfume onto Jesus’ feet, Mary loved Jesus into his future without any condition, a future of death and resurrection; When Jesus, God’s only Son became flesh, God loves us into our future without any condition, a future with restore and reconnect with God; When Jesus healed the sick, taught the hungry heart, washed his disciples’ feet, he loved his people into their future without any condition.

Then the question for us is, **are we able to love Jesus, love our people into their futures without any conditions? Or even are we able to love ourselves into our futures without any conditions? A future even with uncertainty, a future even it doesn’t meet our expectations.**

Today is the last Sunday of Lent, as we enter into the Eastern. Let's prepare our hearts for Jesus's future, a future of suffering, death, and resurrection. Let's love Jesus, love our people, as well as ourselves into a future without any conditions. Amen!