

Sermon for 3-21-10
Christ and the Poor
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John 12:1-8

Today Jesus is in Bethany, at the house of Lazarus and his two sisters Martha and Mary. We have heard of Martha and Mary before, it seems Martha is the one always running around making sure everything is in order and that all the guests are being taken care of instead of spending time with them. But Mary on the other hand sits at Jesus' feet. Mary doesn't worry about what is going on around her, she is only present to Jesus, it's as if He had said to her "Be still and know that I am God."

Today Martha is busy again while Mary is at Jesus' feet. How many times have we done the same thing Martha does, we're busy making sure everything is just right, that the food will come out at the right time, that everyone has something to drink in their hand, and that the appetizers are still warm. But why can't we be like Mary and enjoy our guests, not worry so much about everything being just right. I believe the most important part of the evening is the precious moments we take to spend with family and friends.

Can you imagine what it must have been like to sit at the feet of Jesus and just listen to Him, I think it would be so overwhelming. To just sit and listen and interact with Him, to see Him laugh, smile, maybe even reach down and place His hand on your head, and feel His love leaving Him and flowing through you. And Mary gets to do just that whenever Jesus comes to visit. Somehow she knows that it is important for her to be there. Today Mary takes a pound of Nard, a perfumed oil, that is very expensive, and starts anointing Jesus' feet. We do not know how Mary acquired the oil but according to Judas the value is about one year's wages.

Mary slowly rubs the oil into Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair. How emotional that must have been for her, what a sign of love, and servitude at the feet of Jesus. Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead and I believe that after that Mary had no doubt that there was something wonderful and powerful about Jesus, that He was like no other one that had come before Him. But the people around Jesus did not understand the significance of what Mary was doing, they only knew she must have spent a lot of money. Jesus tells them to leave her alone; she bought it so she could keep it for the day of my burial. Well I'm sure that put everyone in a little shock, they probably all looked at each other questioningly saying, "Where did that come from?" I'm not even sure Mary understood it at the time, but He wanted to let them know He was going away and that they needed to spend as much time with Him as they could. He tells them "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Well for us today, Jesus is no longer physically here and we can't sit at His feet like Mary and the disciples did, but we can spend as much time with Him as we want. He is now always with us and we can come to His feet anytime of the day or night. We can come on our knees before Him in prayer and praise, we can lay our burdens down, and find peace as we lift our voices up to Him in worship but there is something else we can do.

In the Gospel today Jesus said we would have the poor with us always, even then He knew that there would always be poor in the world, so let us be His feet in the world. We might not have expensive perfume to bath someone's feet in, but we can walk with them as Jesus' would and let them know they are not alone.

I heard a story about a church that was across the street from a homeless shelter. They wanted to work with the homeless but didn't know how to go about it. They were afraid to take that first step. It was a church that was very close knit and really was not open to people that were different than them. One day a poor homeless man walked into this church in his normal baggy clothes, long hair, and a little smelly, it was normal for him but to the church it was someone that no one knew what to do with. All they could think of was to get him out any way necessary. They were hoping the priest would say something, they all sat in silence. As the homeless man walked up the aisle all of the pews seemed to fill suddenly. He continued up until he was all the way to the front of the aisle and not having anywhere to sit he sat down in the aisle. Well that just about topped everything and they were stunned.

But in the back of the church a lone man stood up, bent over with age, having love in his heart for this man he did not know. He knew he was getting up and walking away from his family, his friends, making a fool of himself in front of the church, just like Mary did in front of her guests as she anointed Christ's feet. The old man continued on because the love of Christ was in him. The congregation all breathed a sigh of relief because they thought, "Oh thank God someone is doing something to get this smelly, dirty, man out of here." But to their amazement they watched as this man slowly walked with a cane to the front of the aisle and did not try to drag the homeless man out of church but sat down next to him on the floor, put his arm around him, and welcomed him to church. As everyone sat there in silence the priest said "What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen you will never forget."

As St. Theresa of Avila, a nun who lived in the late 1500's said, "God has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all the people now."

So today let us go forth into the world as servants for Christ.

Amen

