

# “The Heart of Giving”

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John 12: 1-8

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We don't think about it much, or talk about it, but did you know that Jesus and the disciples had finances for their ministry? They had a common purse – an actual purse or bag where they put the money that they received.

Even in Jesus' day you couldn't live for free. Food, lodging, and clothing all came with a cost. Maybe they didn't have to pay for gas, but they did have to pay for oil—as in “Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning!” Likely their needs were not extravagant; they would have relied heavily on hospitality; but they still needed some money and there were people who contributed financially to Jesus ministry.

In fact three women are named who did just that: “*Soon afterwards he [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.*” (Luke 8:1-3) Likely they received other donations along the way.

Judas was their treasurer. No doubt being the treasurer for Jesus, 12 disciples and a few others was a little easier in those days (before bank fees, tax receipts and reporting to CRA!) but the basics were the same for Judas as for us today. He had to manage two sides of a balance sheet: what comes in and what goes out. And at the end of the day we want it to balance and we want there to be enough. Judas was the one who got to worry about that more than the other disciples, and I don't doubt that at times he did worry.

Our scripture story takes place at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, just one week before Jesus is executed on the cross. Jesus has been talking about his death and mostly they are not getting it. But it's pretty clear to me that unlike the others, Mary does accept that his time with them was limited. That's likely the reason she gives an incredible and almost senseless gift of love. The gift is perfume, also called Spikenard or Muskroot, which comes from the region of the Himalayas.



So you can understand a little why it was so expensive. That nard would have travelled by foot – whether human or donkey or camel - all the way from the Himalayas to Bethany for this occasion.

The presence of Jesus seems so precious ... and perhaps for her, in that moment, so fleeting. Instead of just using water, she pours this incredibly expensive oil on his feet. Here she is washing, not just dabbing, but washing and spilling this incredible oil all over Jesus' feet, so much so that the entire room is filled with the woody, spicy scent of this perfume.

I picture silence falling over the room. I picture everyone looking at Jesus, expecting him to say something, expecting him to at the very least say to Mary, "Thank you, but this is too much. Save your oil for a special occasion", and perhaps even expecting Jesus to say what Judas ended up saying "*Mary, what are you doing? Why are you wasting this oil? You should have sold it and given the money to the poor. You are a foolish woman.*"

In John's gospel it is Judas who says this out loud, but in the other gospels all the disciples are grumbling and thinking the same thing: "What a waste! This seed money, she simply spent it all in one shot on Jesus—and he loved her and praised her for it! Jesus does not call her foolish, he does not call it a waste; no, he defends her and praises her!"

Do you remember on another occasion when Jesus sat opposite the treasury to watch people putting money into the offering box? (Mark 12:41-44). Many rich people were putting in large sums of money, but what caught Jesus' eye was a poor widow who came and put in two small copper coins. Someone has figured out that those Roman copper coins were worth 1/64<sup>th</sup> of a denarius – a denarius was the amount a labourer received in a day.

The difference in the value of the nard that Mary gave and the coins that the woman gave was about the difference between buying a donut at Tim Hortons or buying a luxury car. There is no comparison. And yet Jesus praised this widow too.

What did the two women have in common? Both gave selflessly, without concern for their own needs, and quite simply both gave from the heart. It didn't matter one bit that one gave an extravagant amount and the other gave less than a tip at restaurant. What mattered was that their hearts ❤️ were full of and focused on God.

The human heart weighs less than a pound. It beats 100,000 times a day and over 2.5 billion times in the average lifetime. This is the heart of the human life. Without it your body quickly stops working and living. Jesus

talks a lot about the heart, a metaphor for the inner life. It is a metaphor for the center of who we are in our mind and our spirit.

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment was and he responded: *“Here O Israel, the Lord, the Lord almighty is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”* It seems to me that that’s exactly what Mary was doing — loving her Lord with all her heart, with all her mind and soul and body. It was extravagant even to the point of looking foolish. But real love is often foolish looking.

By contrast, is pretty clear that Judas’ heart was not healthy. As he spoke and acted in the days leading up to when he betrayed Jesus he was clearly filled with fear, with jealousy, and perhaps with anger. John tells us Judas was a thief, and regularly dipped into the common purse. There wasn’t much love in his heart and there was a fair bit of greed – only a few days after this event, he betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus talked a lot about money: roughly 5% of his preaching and 11 out of 39 parables were about money or possessions. Why? *Because more than anything else, money has the potential to separate us from God.*

In the parable of the Sower, from Mark 4:18-19 Jesus says: *“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”* Money and our attachment or relationship to it has the potential to choke out what God wants to grow in us.

Another time Jesus tells us: *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Matthew 6:21

Just for a moment I want you to picture holding your credit card or a \$20 bill in your hand. What comes to mind? What feelings do you have? Do you wish you had a little more or a lot more? Are you worried or afraid that there won’t be enough? Do you feel guilty for spending or for the debt you have? Do you feel gratitude that you have that money or that credit or debit card? Do you struggle with what to do with that money?

... Now, can you imagine sharing your worries your desires, your fears, your gratitude to God? Share and listen.

*I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than these? Can any one of you by worrying*

*add a single hour to your life?... but strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:25-27&33)*

God knows your needs and your fears. We are called to worship God only, and we are called to trust God. We are called to trust that God will provide.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, famously said about money: “Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” As followers of Jesus we are called to prayerfully spend and save and give. This is also true for us as a church. We are not called to look at our budgets – which we are in the middle of now—fearfully, but to look and consider prayerfully.

The ministry of Jesus today still requires money. Often what needs money is not so glamorous – things like heat, a new roof, a computer repair or a piano tuning or salaries.

But what these things translate into is life. It is translated into being able to host something like 350 people for a full-course Thanksgiving dinner without charge; into opening our doors to so many community groups from AA to Shout Sister, to many seniors’ classes with the Brockville 50+ activity center; into people who come in cold and wanting a cup of coffee and a prayer; into sponsoring Refugees; into offering a safe space for people who identify as LGBTQ to explore their faith; it is translated into you and me remembering and believing we are precious and valuable, that God knows and loves and calls us to love and be the hands and feet of Christ to others.

I’d like to end today with a poem by Pat Milliken:

**“Because We Bear the Name of Christ”**

“Because we bear the name of Christ  
There are no other necessary words,  
no multitude of reasons required.

We do not give because there is a budget to be met  
and we are faced with a long line of deficit figures;

We do not give because we know  
we spent extravagantly  
and feel guilty at the reminders of hungry children  
and homeless wanderers;

We do not give to feel good about ourselves  
or even because we should.

We give *because we bear the name of Christ*  
With joy,  
delighted to be able to offer with  
outstretched hands gifts in abundance;  
In hope,  
for the gift will be blessed and multiplied,  
a single seed becomes a head of wheat,  
each kernel plump, satisfying, and good;  
a cup of water becomes a torrent of rain  
filling the greatest thirst; washing clean;  
In faith,  
this blessed gift will be enough  
*because we bear the name of Christ.*

Thanks be to God, Amen.