

February 20, 2005

A.M. Service – Second Sunday of Lent

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Three Examples of Stewardship”

John 12:1-11 NLT

Six days before the Passover ceremonies began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus--the man he had raised from the dead. 2 A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus sat at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with fragrance.

4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples--the one who would betray him--said, 5 "That perfume was worth a small fortune. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." 6 Not that he cared for the poor--he was a thief who was in charge of the disciples' funds, and he often took some for his own use.

7 Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did it in preparation for my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but I will not be here with you much longer."

9 When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. 10 Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, 11 for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

Last week we read of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (the brother of Martha and Mary). Shortly after that (John 11:51-54), aware of the plot against his life, because of raising Lazarus, Jesus withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim. Jesus and his disciples stayed there for a while then traveled up to Galilee before returning to Bethany at the time of the Passover. So not long after the raising of Lazarus and six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived back in Bethany, the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary where a dinner was prepared in His honor. As was characteristic of Martha she served at this dinner. Many came not only to see Jesus but also to see Lazarus who was raised from the dead, for Lazarus was at the table with Jesus. It was the first time someone was able to attend their own funeral dinner. Then (vs. 10-11) the leading priests decided to kill (not just Jesus, but) Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted (the leading priests some of whom taught that there is no resurrection – so you can see why they wanted to get rid of the evidence, i.e. Lazarus. And many were leaving them) and believed in Jesus.

Last week I spoke briefly about good stewardship. All we are and all we have belong to God and we must be good stewards of it. That means we are morally responsible for the careful use of money, time, talents, or other resources according to the principles that God has given us as recorded in His Word, the Bible. This is not to be a burden but a desire motivated by our love for God Who has so abundantly loved us.

In this story (our text) we have three examples of stewardship:

Dutifully

Martha (does her duty and) gives to God, as she is required to give. She serves the Lord and others at this dinner, as she ought. She was not, necessarily, doing any more than she ought. One time, at another dinner, she complained that she was the only one doing the work. Now, perhaps I am not being fair to Martha in order to make my point, but there are Christians that just do the bare minimum. They give what they are suppose to give, and that is fine, but sometimes they will complain about it or complain about those who are not giving. Whether it is their money, time, talents, or other resources they do what they are suppose to do and no more. Then they get upset if they are not recognized for what they do or give. [I am not saying we should not recognize those who serve and express appreciation to them (as we *have* done this morning)].

Imagine if a major league Catcher complained, "I have to stay in this uncomfortable crouched position every inning. I catch the ball, I throw back the ball, I catch the ball, I throw back the ball. If someone is running to home I have to block the plate and take the chance of getting plowed in to. And when the game is over, even though I'm the one that signals the pitch of what to throw, do I get credit for the win? No, the pitcher gets the win." We would laugh at him, for after all, he's complaining about being a catch, which is what he's getting paid to do.

In Luke 17:7-10 (NLT) Jesus tells this parable to His disciples:

7 "When a servant comes in from plowing or taking care of sheep, he doesn't just sit down and eat. 8 He must first prepare his master's meal and serve him his supper before eating his own. 9 And the servant is not even thanked, because he is merely doing what he is supposed to do. 10 In the same way, when you obey me you should say, 'We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty.' "

When Jesus' followers obey, they have only done their duty and should regard it as a privilege... Obedience is not something extra done for God; it is the duty of anyone who desires to be Christ's follower... Jesus was not (saying that our) service (is) meaningless or useless, nor was he doing away with rewards. He was attacking unwarranted self-esteem and spiritual pride ... Jesus' followers focus their eyes on God with their goal only to serve and please him. They don't work for recognition or rewards or even for God to praise them for their hard work. They understand that their duty is to serve the Master. (from The Life Application Commentary Series copyright (C) 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 by the Livingstone Corporation. Produced with permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.)

But every once and a while we hear of the sacrifice of a follower of Christ.

Sacrificially

Mary gives to God sacrificially. Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard (I just bought my wife some of that for Valentine's Day. Not

really. Actually I could not afford twelve ounces of the essence of nard, a fragrant herb from the mountains of India imported in alabaster bottles during biblical times. It was actually something that people in Biblical times kept as an investment (as we would do with gold today). The Bible says that it was worth a years wage. What's that equivalent to today? \$ 40 – \$50, 000? Men, if you bought 12 oz. of an expensive perfume for your wife it may be worth a week's wage not a year's wage!). And what did Mary do with this very expensive investment of perfume? She poured it out on Jesus' feet. Then, she not only anointed His feet, but she wiped his feet with her hair. We know that some criticized what she did, I wonder if some were humiliated. Mary gave more than expected of her and the house was filled with fragrance. Some give what they are suppose to, some give sacrificially. Like Mary, who gave all she had. I would think that if she were willing to give this expensive perfume, she'd be willing to give (money, time, talents, or other resources) beyond what God requires in His Word.

There are some who do what they are required to do in their giving of money, time, talents, and that's good. We should do what is required of us without complaining. Not only because it is required, not only because we want to be under God's blessing, but because we love God. But, there are some who understand the way God has abundantly blessed them and they want to give more then is required of them. Not for recognition, as a matter of fact, they may even be criticized for what they do. Some may see it as humiliating or foolish. But they don't care all they care about is their love and thanks to God. Those who have been forgiven much love much.

Mary gave extravagantly. Mary's gift was so extraordinary that it serves to remind us of the lavish abundance of God grace. He gave so much for us why shouldn't we be extravagant in our giving to Him.

Think of how God saves, how freely we are given joyous forgiveness by the sacrifice of Jesus. He is our example in sacrificial giving. No one was ever rescued from sin by stingy applications of the blood of Christ.

So Mary, whom God had abundantly forgiven, came to Jesus. She dared not dab a bit of nard here and there on Jesus. She did not receive his grace that way; she would not give that way. She poured out all she had on Jesus Whom she adored. Judas said it was a waste of money. But Jesus knew better. (Based on an excerpted from "*The Christ of Easter: Reading for the Season of Resurrection*" by Calvin Miller).

Mary wasn't looking for recognition, yet, [recorded in Matt 26:13 (NIV)], Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

But now let's talk about Judas.

Robbery

Judas Robs God; (vs. 4-6) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples--the one who would betray him--said, "That perfume was worth a small fortune. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor--he was a thief who was in charge of the disciples' funds, and he often took some for his own use. Some, who would

say they are Christians, do not give sacrificially and do not even give what is required of them. In a sense they are robbing from God. When we are not good stewards [morally responsible for the careful use of money, time, talents, or other resources according to the principles that God has given us as recorded in His Word, the Bible], we are not only disobeying God we are robbing God – taking for ourselves what we should be giving God. This is what God told Malachi [Mal 3:8-14 (NIV)]. "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' [then He gives the example of our giving] "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse-the whole nation of you-because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty. [God is talking about giving to Him what we are required, our duty, the tithe, and to give to Him sacrificially, He talks about tithes *and* offerings. He says, "You are under a curse because you are robbing me." And His desire is not to curse but to bless. So, He says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." He goes on to explain that He would bless their work and prosper them, "I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit." But, this is only one aspect of good stewardship remember. We are also to serve God with our time and talents, and when we don't the Lord says, (v.13-14) "You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD. Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements.' They were serving God for what they could get. That is not the point here. I am not teaching give to God *so that* you can get. I want you to serve like Mary from a heart overwhelmed by the love of God. Think of the extravagance in which God gives to us. Let's not rob God by holding back what is our duty to give to Him (in all areas – not just money, but time, talents). And at times, when we are overwhelmed by the abundance of God's grace in our lives, let's give to Him sacrificially, extravagantly. Not to be blessed, though God will bless us. He does not forget what we do for Him.

[How would you describe the stewardship of your money, time, talents, other resources: "Doing my duty?" "Giving sacrificially?" "Robbing God?"]