# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Jesus’ Anointing”**

**John 12:1-8**

**April 7, 2019**

“Who is Jesus?” This has been our guiding question as we have been making our way through John’s Gospel. We have explored this question from the various angles provided us by John. First, who is Jesus in his divine nature as the Son of God. Then, who is Jesus as the one who calls others to follow him, who spends time teaching them about the Kingdom of God, and who performs miracles that they may believe that he is sent and empowered by his heavenly Father. John has also shown us who Jesus is in the eyes of his opponents, those who refused to believe in him and considered him a mere man full of heretical and dangerous ideas about himself. In our text this morning, John will show us who Jesus was for three of his closest friends, as well as one who should have been close to Jesus but was not. As we explore this story together, you and I will also have the opportunity to ask ourselves who Jesus is in our lives. Not who he is theologically or historically, but who is for each one of us personally. I invite you to turn with me to John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus’ feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance. But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said,“That perfume was worth a year’s wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples’ money, he often stole some for himself. Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

Here we meet again three friends of Jesus: Martha, Lazarus and Mary. We first met Martha and Mary when they invited Jesus and his disciples into their home for a meal. While Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, Martha was busy fixing supper. But she was not a happy cook, for she was upset that Mary was not in the kitchen helping her. She was anxious, troubled, and worried, trying to do everything by herself. Finally, she exploded and blamed the whole mess on Jesus, saying to him, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me.” In response, Jesus lovingly told Martha that she had become worried and upset over all the details of the meal. But, Jesus said, there was only one thing worth being concerned about, and Mary had discovered it. Who is that one thing? As we see in our text this morning, the one thing is Jesus himself.

Martha did what she was most comfortable doing – she served. Perhaps, like many of us, she found it difficult to express in words how she felt about Jesus, but she loved to serve. So, she let her meals do the talking for her. And this time, her heart was so focused on Jesus, so grateful for who he was and what he had done in raising her brother Lazarus from the grave, that she served with only one concern in mind: how she might express her love for Jesus. Who was Jesus for Martha? He was the one she loved, and she expressed her love for him in service to him. Who is Jesus for you and me? In our love for him, may he be the one we gladly serve, considering him our number one priority over anything else in our lives that requires our time and attention.

Lazarus, we are told, was among those who reclined at the table eating with Jesus. While Martha was expressing her love for Jesus through service, Lazarus was expressing his love for Jesus through fellowship. He is content to be with Jesus, to be in his presence, to listen as Jesus speaks, and to express his gratitude to Jesus for blessing his life. And what a blessing this was for Jesus, as well. He hadn’t raised Lazarus from the dead just so Lazarus could go on the speaking circuit, signing book contracts, and taking advantage of his newfound celebrity as the man who had come back from the dead. He had given Lazarus new life so that he and Lazarus could be together, enjoying one another’s company.

In the same way, Jesus has given you and me new life in order that we may be with him. Speaking to his disciples on the night before he would die on the cross, he said, “I am going away. But, I will come back to bring you to where I am, so that you will always be with me.” To be with Jesus, to spend time with him through Scripture and in prayer, to simply think about him and express our gratitude to him, is what he desires from us. Who was Jesus for Lazarus? He was the one he loved, and he expressed his for love Jesus by being close to him. Who is Jesus for you me? In our love for Jesus, may he be the one with whom, every day, we gladly stay in touch.

Martha expressed her love for Jesus through service, and Lazarus expressed his love for Jesus through fellowship. Mary expressed her love for Jesus through sacrifice. Somehow Mary had obtained a jar of expensive perfume, worth thousands of dollars in today’s money. Her heart was so filled with joy and thanksgiving and love for Jesus, that she poured the whole jar out on him. Then she knelt before him and wiped off the excess liquid on his feet with her hair. Mary was living out loud how she felt in her heart. And, as her devotion overflowed in this extreme action, Jesus affirmed her and told her that she had done a good thing. Who was Jesus for Mary? He was the one she loved, and she expressed her love for Jesus through a sacrificial action.

I don’t know if you are familiar with the music of James Taylor, but one of the most popular songs of the 1970s was “Shower the People.” Let me share with you the lyrics:

You can play the game and you can act out the part,  
even though you know it wasn't written for you.  
Tell me, how can you stand there with your broken heart ashamed of playing the fool?  
One thing can lead to another; it doesn't take any sacrifice.  
Oh, father and mother, sister and brother, if it feels nice, don't think twice,  
just shower the people you love with love, show them the way that you feel.  
Things are gonna work out fine if you only will do as I say, just  
shower the people you love with love, show them the way you feel.  
Things are gonna be much better if you only will.

Mary wasn’t ashamed of playing the fool when it came to expressing how she felt about Jesus. She showered the one she loved with love, and the sweet fragrance of that love filled the house. She was extravagant, she went all out, and she was willing to give the most precious material thing she owned, all for Jesus. This is who Jesus was for Mary. Who is Jesus for you and me? In our love for Jesus, may he be the one for whom we are willing to go all out. For, you see, you can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. That brings us to Judas.

Who was Jesus for Judas? Jesus was someone to whom Judas had been willing to give time and energy as a disciple, but Judas loved himself more than he loved Jesus. Judas loved his own ideas about right and wrong. Judas loved being in charge of the money, often stealing some of it for his personal needs and desires. Judas loved his own expectations of Jesus and, when those expectations went unmet, he turned his back on Jesus and betrayed him. Who is Jesus for you and me? May our love for him be stronger than our love for ourselves, and may he never be the one on whom we turn our backs and betray simply because he has not done for us what we selfishly wanted for ourselves.

Who is Jesus? My prayer for you and for me is that Jesus is the one we shower with love - with the love of service, with the love of fellowship, with the love of sacrifice, with a love that is stronger that the love we have for ourselves. And, should Jesus not be the one we love in this way today, may the Holy Spirit who lives in each one of us deepen our love for Jesus and then give us the desire to show him how we feel. Things are going to be much better between us and Jesus, if we only will.