

Pastor Dave Wegner
Sermon John 12:1-8
Lent 5C
April 7, 2019

A fully loaded 2019 Cadillac CT6.

1/5 of our home in Forest Park.

383 months of unlimited Metra rides between Chicago and Wheaton.

A Cessna 172 piston propeller plane – built in 1975.

**513 round-trip tickets from Midway to Mobile, Alabama in coach,
Without overhead bin storage.**

5 of the turbine blades from one of the engines in one of those jets.

37,500 BigMacs in Egypt, only 12,000 in Switzerland.

Some of these would be fun, interesting,

Possibly extravagant expenditures –

The last certainly yielding further expenses

From hospitals and cardio-thoracic surgeons:

But they are all things on which I could spend a year of my wages.

Enough daily BigMacs in Egypt to last 102 years.

A car lasts a while,

We certainly enjoy our home,

I can't wait to own and fly a plane one day,

And I would need to find some very dear friends in Mobile first,

But the outpouring of such costly liquid onto Jesus' feet,

It running over the skin and soaking into the dusty floor,

Even the powerful smell eventually dissipating,

That just seems over the top:

Too extravagant,

Too costly,

Too frivolous,

Too lavish,

Too prodigal.

**The ulterior-motivated Judas may have been chastised for his comment,
But the sentiment was not entirely wrong, right?**

Especially because it is likely

That Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were among

Those without many resources in the first place:

Likely close to being part of the poor

About which Judas spoke.

But it is precisely because of Jesus' rebuke,

His commentary on the scene unfolding before him,

And the events yet to unfold in Jerusalem,

That this brief narrative becomes such a clear example

Of what it means to be a disciple;

What it means to be a follower of Christ.

Thus, we are met with 4 models of discipleship in only 8 verses.

If each word was a dollar – only 25 Swiss BigMacs.

Discipleship Modeling Point #1: Martha serves.

Martha is often given a bad rap because of her busyness.

She is often negatively compared to her sister's

Attentive and contemplative gaze

Whenever Jesus comes around.

But Martha's tasks as chef, director of hospitality, and server

Are not jobs for which she drew the short straw,

But rather gifts of services with which she was blessed,

Ways that she ensured those who came to their home

Felt the same love that drew such heavy tears

At the tomb of her brother not days before.

The great Italian violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvelous violin to Genoa – the city of his birth – but only on condition that the instrument never be played. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay.

The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The moldering instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from service to others loses its meaning.

Discipleship Modeling Point #2: Lazarus lives.

**Speaking of Martha's brother, the Gospel author makes a point
In letting us know that he sat among them that evening.**

**Remember, that in the previous chapter, he was dead.
He was dead and in the grave for several days,
And Jesus raised him up from that grave,
Directed the now astonished mourners
To unbind him from his grave clothes
In order to set him free to live again.**

**An encounter with Jesus does not leave you where you started.
When Jesus calls us up out of our tombs
And sets us free to live again
Then we should very well do it!**

**Those made alive in and through Christ
Do not just go out and do their own thing
As if something miraculous didn't just happen.**

**Alive in Christ we do not go about the daily slog,
Living ever more isolated lives
Despite rapid transit options and instant messaging.**

**We live in community with one another.
We dine and pray and give and serve.
We invite and host and welcome to our own tables
As if Jesus was our guest:
Just as Jesus invites us to his own.**

Discipleship Modeling Point #3: Mary gives.

Mary gave of their resources and her person.

**Long hair was prized among women in the first century,
And it was customary for long hair to be tied up in public,
Only loosed to be cleaned, in one's home,
Or among close relatives or friends.**

**The phrase "letting your hair down" might have been coined
After this ancient cultural tradition,
In which a person who was relaxed and among friends
Could literally and appropriately let their hair down.**

**Along with the very costly ointment she used,
Mary took on the role of a servant to anoint Jesus' feet,
An intimate at personal part of the body in the 1st century.**

**One would usually wash their own feet before entering a home,
A well-to-do host might assign their servants to the task,
But Mary assumes the humbling posture
To spread costly oil and dry with loosed hair.**

**There are only two times a body is anointed with oil:
Coronation and burial.**

**Mary's extravagant gift is fit for a king,
Prefiguring Jesus' impending entrance into Jerusalem
While shouts of Hosanna fill the streets,
And Jesus' entombment in a nearby garden,
While shouts of "crucify him" still echo.**

Finally, Discipleship Modeling Point #4: We have the poor.

**Jesus' final words in this passage are difficult.
Christian groups for many years have used this text
To justify self-serving ministries.**

**The thinking can easily go "since the poor will always be around,
"There's nothing much we can do
"So we'll spend time working on ourselves instead."**

**If Jesus is correct in his observation,
And looking at economic data from any region confirms he is,
Then some may wonder why work hard
To overcome a system that will always be broken,
Where people will always be poor and needy?
What's the point?**

**In Cornerstones Bible Study this past week
I mentioned there was a conundrum in the Greek to English
Translation in verse 8.
And I was delighted that the group let me
Bible-geek out for a moment.**

**Where in English, Jesus says “You always have the poor,”
The Greek is ambiguous.**

**It could either be present tense with continuance in the future,
“You always have the poor,”
Or, without any grammar or spelling changes,
Be an imperative, “Hey you, always have the poor.”**

**At the end of these model moments of discipleship,
Jesus could be indicating that Martha’s acts of service,
Lazarus’ acts of life-filled presence,
And Mary’s acts of giving and humility,
Are meant to be done with, among, and for the poor...
Always.**

**Throughout his earthly ministry,
Jesus is among the poor.
He has them.
He keeps them.**

**Always keep the poor among you because that is where
The Kingdom of God breaks in most clearly,
Good News to a people broken by empire,
Broken by systems of inequality and injustice.**

**Always keep the poor among you because that is where Jesus is.
Because that is also for whom Jesus stretches out his arms.**

**Jesus promises to show up in the meal we are about to receive,
In the waters that lapped upon our heads,
But our encounters do not leave us where we started.**

**As this Lenten journey draws ever closer to the hill outside Jerusalem,
Fed, forgiven, blessed, and empowered to serve, live, and give,
May we press on toward the goal of our call to keep.**