

## **Wanting More**

The Dark Valley: Part 5 “Wanting More”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – April 3, 2022

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Readings:** John 12:1-8

**Reflection:** Psalm 126

**Greeting:** Tear your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord for he is merciful and compassionate. God is very patient and full of faithful love. The Lord our God is always ready to forgive. (*Joel 2*)

**Prayer:** Lord, your mercy is always upon us. Be gracious to all those who have strayed from your ways and welcome them once again into your love. Lift us up so that we may always turn to you with repentant hearts and may embrace you in faith. Help us to hold to the eternal truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit live and reign as one God, forevermore. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 126

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*  
(Psalm 126 NRSV\*)

We read the words of Psalm 126 and hear of God’s restoration. That God transforms sadness into joy and sorrow into rejoicing. Can you think of a time where God restored you? Does the presence of Christ bring shouts of joy to your lips? Do you speak of the great things that the Lord has done for you? Do you share your joy with others? Do you share God’s grace with others so that they may know that joy as well? How do you share in the love and faithfulness that Christ has shown you?

**Prayer:** Lord, we turn to you now in prayer. We come before you with the celebrations of the joys in our lives. We come before you with the troubles of our hearts. We look to you in all things that your steadfast love may guide and lead us. Help us in our doubts and worries and strengthen us in faith, through Jesus Christ, our faithful redeemer. May we find peace and grace through that same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading for today comes from John chapter 12 verses 1 through 8.

*Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." (John 12:1-8 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

With this week's message, we look at something that is a problem at almost any stage of our lives but is definitely one that can lead us into the dark valley. This idea of wanting more can come into play and blind us to a lot of things in life. What we see in the reading for today is Mary coming in and using some costly perfume to anoint Jesus' feet. There's an aside to try to write off Judas here, but it doesn't change the fact that what he's saying is true. And I think sometimes we see that aside and write off his statement because of his future actions. But Judas asks a rather good question. This perfume was expensive. Had they sold it, it would have been almost a year's wages for someone. They could have given that money to the poor. Now the part that becomes odd in this exchange is Judas saying something that is very true and can feel very reasonable and it's Jesus' response that can feel odd. He says that Mary has kept this for the day of his burial. "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." And even that statement is a little enigmatic. But the part I wanted to focus on was that idea of "we had it, we should have gone after it and gotten more." This idea of always wanting more, even in the idea of wanting to do more good. Which, normally, we would look at that and say of course we should always be looking for ways to do good. Why wouldn't we?

But what happens when wanting more starts to eat away at our ability to live, to be, or to do? And for me, that's part of what's happening here. The inability to see an action for what it is because of what could have been. That the action itself isn't enough because of wanting more. It doesn't matter why it was done, only that it could have been something greater. And that can become an endless spiral. If you spend money on anything, you could always say "if I had just spent less, I could have given more to the poor. If I just didn't spend it at all I could have given away everything!" But at what point do you give away everything and have nothing left to be able to give and suddenly you are unable to help? And that's a difficult thing to think about.

Because faltering in either direction too far becomes a problem. On the one hand, we could this and say that we should enjoy the good things. And in enjoying them, we never worry about giving to the poor. Or, on the other hand, we should always give all that we have. So, you give away all that you have until you have nothing left and are poor yourself. And the problem is that when we go to extremes, we lose our balance. Because both are extremes of wanting more. On the one hand, wanting more for yourself, on the other hand, wanting to give more. And it's finding balance that keeps us from sliding into those extremes and finding those difficulties.

Now, one of the other things about this is that it's also a critique of others. In this we have Judas passing judgment on Mary's action and Jesus' response. And if we were to think about it, almost anybody could have made this statement. And it could be Judas was the one to vocalize what others were thinking, what others were whispering about. Because it would not be the first time the disciples had noted something and didn't understand the why. But more importantly, it isn't a reflection about his own actions but a reflection on the way others are dealing with things. And sometimes it's obvious that more could be done. When we see a billionaire going to space for the fun of it, it's very easy to go "That money could have been used for something better." But when we relate this to things that are in our own lives, this gets much harder. Do we critique a neighbor for spending a little extra for more comfort in their vehicle when that money could have been used for the poor? Do we critique each other because the TV we purchased could have been smaller and that money could have been given to the poor? And it goes on and on. We could critique each other in every way possible. How much money did you spend on those clothes? That money could have been given to the poor! How much did you pay for your shoes? That money could have been given to the poor! How much did you spend on your lunch? That money could have been given to the poor!

I think we can look even beyond the fact that it's Jesus Mary is anointing. That there's a truth in this that we aren't called to live miserable lives. And I think there's a balance between taking care of ourselves and our happiness and the happiness of the people around us and caring for others in what we give. And I think the solution is to learn to be generous with both because if all of your money is spent on only doing things for you, then you aren't being charitable and loving your neighbor as you love yourself. But if you do nothing for yourself, then what's the love of your neighbor going to end up looking like? If you can't find the time to be able to show yourself care, you aren't going to be able to really care for others. And I think that's the pitfall of wanting more. That we could bounce back and forth like a pinball machine between wanting to give and wanting for ourselves until we don't know what to think and we give up completely. That it feels like a paradox that can't be solved. But again, I say the word is balance. Love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Which means you can do good things for yourself and good things for your neighbor. That you don't have to choose one over the other. And it may mean that some days you take better care of yourself than others. Some days you may take better care of the people around. And sometimes you manage to do both. But the important thing is to not lose sight of either and not to let either become an obsession.

Because going to extremes on either direction will leave you incapable of being able to love the way you should love.

The reason I recognize this during this series is not because this is something that happens so much when we get into those difficult times, but that the back and forth can push us into difficult times. Because we begin to second guess and doubt ourselves, whether it's in one direction or the other. And that doubt causes us to lose faith and it causes us to struggle and it can cause us to give up. And like so many things in our lives, it's about finding a balance that allows you to be able to serve and be served, to give and to receive, to love and be loved. In our gospel reading today, Jesus accepts this gift because of its significance and because of its importance and because he won't always be there for her to be able to offer him a gift. Because he won't be there for her to be able to show her thanks in this way again. Because denying her the ability to give the gift would have been denying her the ability to show her love in an expression that was hers. Denying the gift would have taken away something important from Mary. So, we are called to strike a balance in this way. So that we may be loved and love. That we may know good things in life and share with others. Because self-care is important. Recognizing the gifts of others is important. Wanting to help others is important. Understanding the balance is important so that we're not always wanting more. Because eventually, we'll either take and take and take or we'll give and give and give, and in either case, truly be left with nothing. But when we find a balance that lets us love in Christ and be loved in Christ. To recognize each other in love and recognize a gift as a gift and a kindness as a kindness. Then we may walk in love that we may share in Christ, and we may never lose sight of hope. So that instead of always wanting more we can know the love that is. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – The Dark Valley**

Our current series will look at the ways in which we deal with issues such as doubt and loss. How does our grief impact us? How does it impact our relationship with God? What happens in that dark valley?

### **Prayer List**

|   |                    |                    |                        |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Rev Charliam Renner                         | Bishop Frank Beard | Our Conference     | Our Healthcare Workers |
| Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew |                    | Angie Veach        | Eric Veach             |
| Ed & Verna Titus                            | Henry Catey        | Jake Kiser         | Cindy Cisney           |
| Nancy Hoke                                  | Don Wells          | Tricia Adkins      | Don Stewart            |
| Ronnie Winstead                             | Dwight Parsons     | Lauren Stewart     | Phyllis Gable          |
| Sage Martin                                 | Dalton McFarland   | Ruth Ann Finley    | Jodie Bunch            |
| Tom Finley                                  | Laura Carlen       | Judy McCellan      | Rosie Chancelor        |
| Susie Callahan                              | Kenny Holmes       | Ted Marrs          | Family of James Myers  |
| Family of Roger VanScyoc                    | Richard Durham     | Kathy Hanks        | Wayne Carrell          |
| Gary & Mary Winterrowd                      | Leo Smith          | Bonnie Hite        | Sue & Bob Smyser       |
| Larry Thompson                              | Greg Williams      | Eloise Buffenmeyer | Martha Roberts         |
| Charlie & Charlotte Baxter                  | Paul Schulte       | Darrell Quick      | Mammaser Family        |

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