

March 13 2016

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

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Sermon *Blue Book Price*

Now a lot of you are more car-people than I am but I learned a lot the first couple of times I took a foray into the new or used car systems of the world. Anybody who has ever purchased a new or used car and has taken his or her old car in as a trade-in probably knows this thing called *Blue Book*. The *Blue Book* as I understand it is a little manual, little catalog for car dealers that tells you how much they should give you as a trade in for your old car. You take into consideration the mileage, the age, and of course the condition of the car is in and with the help of these factors the dealers in the ideal world are supposed to come to sort of equitable agreement about what your trade-in is worth. But as you and I both know it doesn't always work that way. Does it? Usually the owner of the car believes the dealer is trying to cheat him out of what is due so he presses for a higher trade-in value and usually the dealer feels the customer wants to get a new car for nothing so he presses for a lower trade-in. So the person with the trade-in has to make a difficult decision. How much am I willing to give in order to get that new car which I am so much in love with? How much am I going to compromise in this whole operation? And the same with the dealer as himself or herself must ask the same question. How much can I do in order to make this sale that I am almost desperate to make today? Each person, the owner and the dealer have to decide whether the price which they are seeking is worth, and what must be given up in order to get it. Each person must count the cost whether the prize is worth it in the long run and each will do all they can to get what they want.

This I think is the point which Jesus seems to make in this morning lesson from John's gospel. To drive this point home Jesus rebukes Judas for being so critical of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, when Mary anoints Jesus' feet with which the Scriptures tell us with a pound of costly ointment made with pure Nard. Mary must have used the full portion of the ointment because we are told the whole house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. Likewise she must have poured out every single ounce of human emotion in the act of humility and serve that she performed that day. The Bible tells us that she even wiped his feet with her hair. Now though John would have us believe that Judas had been robbing money out of the money box all throughout the ministry of Jesus. Judas strangely was extremely

critical of this sacrifice on the part of Jesus. And he asked the question, why wasn't the ointment sold for three hundred denarii which by the way is three hundred days wages for the average laborer of that day, was sold, and the money given to the poor. But Jesus defended Mary's action Jesus says," Let Mary alone, let her use the ointment for the day of my burial. The poor you will always have with you but you will not always have me."

Now we have to be very careful about Jesus' answer here because it bears some explaining, because I have heard people time and time again use this as an excuse for not being generous with those in need all around us. Jesus is obviously is not saying that we should just blow our material possessions and ignore the poor with needs all around us Obviously Jesus had compassion for those in need for in the course of almost every aspect of the Gospel. I think what Jesus is saying here, our extravagant love and generously to God and others is not too much to ask in light of the extravagant love that God has for us in Jesus Christ. Mary's actions may seem way over the top –the thought which I got from the kids about wiping somebody's feet with their hair, let alone washing someone's feet. It was extravagant from the outset—over the top, but Mary was showing her love, she was showing her dedication for Jesus in the only way that she knew how by placing herself and by placing the ointment by the very feet of Jesus.

The passage from Philippians, chapter three which was read to us this morning, tells us of the willingness of people of faith to give all of their faith in the most radical terms. Let me repeat all the words. "Indeed St Paul says I count everything as loss because of the spectacular worth of knowing Christ as my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things .and this is blunt, and I count them as refuse, count them as garbage that in order that I might gain Jesus and to be found in him. Not have the righteousness of my own under the law but that was faith in Jesus the righteousness from God that depends on faith that I might know him and the power of his resurrection. And I may share in his suffering becoming like him in his death if possible that I might obtain resurrection from the dead."

It occurred to me as I was thinking about Paul's passage here that my experience working with children and youth is a prime example in our world in what Paul is talking about. It is one of the most difficult tasks in the world to work effectively with children and youth in whatever area in life that you might choose. It is one of the most time consuming and in human terms, it can be the most thankless job because you really don't always see that instant gratification that you see in other areas of life; but if you take in consideration that the joys of working with kids I think the benefits far outweigh the costs. You know you have an impact of something lasting in proportion on a young life when you know you are serving God in a meaningful way in the community. When you see something clicks for the young

child and they understand exactly what was said then you know it is has all been worthwhile.

God loves and cares for each one of us. The questions that remain for us this morning to answer are these as we continue our Lenten walk. Have we responded to God's love for us in a real way lately? Has our faith cost us anything in the last couple of months? Have we been there for God and others in the way that we live our lives each and every day? We can only answer these questions for ourselves. Only we can answer these questions for ourselves. Only we can count the cost of our own discipleship to see whether the Blue Book price is truly worth the sacrifice that we have to make in our lives of faith. And together we say AMEN.