

Leap of Faith?

Scripture: John 12:1 – 8

Sept. 24th, 2023

A father shared this story - when he gets home his daughter would always take a flying leap into in his over the front porch steps. When his daughter saw his car pull up, she would go out onto the front porch and wait for him to make it to the steps. Then and only then, she would propel herself into his arms. Then would come a big hug and those wonderful words - 'I love you daddy!'

If you think about it, maybe this routine could have turned out differently. What if she would miscalculate her jump? What if dad did not get ready at the right moment? Could she have fallen and cracked her head? Could she have been dropped like an incomplete pass? Could she have broken her neck? Her life could have changed forever! No cheerleader, no gymnastics, or no ballet! Dad would not walk her down the aisle at her wedding, he would have to wheel her down the aisle in a wheel chair! If you truly think about it - her leap could have hurt her badly!

Yet, even as we ponder these tragic things, we cannot resist being captivated by her unrestrained exuberance. We cannot smile at her overwhelming love for her dad. In our scripture reading today, we find Mary leaping into Jesus arms in some way

Mary pours precious ointment on Jesus' feet and she kneels down to wipe it from his feet with her hair! Have you ever done something so wanton? Have I ever done something like this so uncalculated? Have we ever done something so over the top? Think for a moment - have you ever done something like this?

When is extravagance simply wasteful? When is extravagance a needless risk? When is extravagance absolutely essential to be genuinely human and authentically faithful? When is extravagance somewhat holy and so full of wonder and delight that it is not to be missed?

I have no formula to use to tell you when extravagance is good or bad. I cannot tell you how to crunch the details of some specific situation and grind out a reliable answer. I just have a strong sense that a life without such extravagance is terribly sad. A life dominated by caution is a sad life. Being careful and calculating the cost benefit of everything you do, is a constricted life.

How can you hang around Jesus for a very long time and not catch this spirit of reckless abandon that Mary had? How can you call yourself a disciple of Christ and not do extravagant acts?

Jesus called the sons of Zebedee, the sons of thunder, away from their boats, their nets, their jobs, and their family - and they went!

Jesus counseled a young man to sell all his possessions and revolutionize his life and follow him - but he made a calculation that stopped him.

Jesus offered the honor of his company to a swindler named Zacchaeus instead of the honorable folk, and Zacchaeus responded by promising to pay back fourfold whatever he had cheated anyone of which would leave Zacchaeus with little.

Jesus was warned that the high priest and King Herod were gunning for him, but Jesus immediately dismissed the warning and stayed the course.

A few days after accepting Mary's lavish gift in our scripture text, Jesus gave his disciples his last commandment – 'to love one another in the same manner that he had loved them as one who is willing and able to lay down one's life'.

Over the top - Jesus was always over the top! How can we be under the influence of Jesus and not be extravagant?

(Stand up front)

How could I illustrate extravagant love for Jesus like Mary did? Could I tell you that I am going to give a year's worth of income to relieve the suffering of the poor in the world and our country?

How could I illustrate extravagant love for Jesus like Mary did? Could I tell you that I am going to become a foster parent and receive one of those hard to place children with a traumatic past and a troubled present even though I am planning on retiring soon?

(Invite Sherri to come up front)

How could my wife and I illustrate extravagant love for Jesus like Mary did? Could we tell you that we are going to become missionaries in a foreign land without running water and electricity?

Would these things fill the world with the fragrance of love for Jesus? Would these things express the trust I have in Jesus? What do I do? And for us - what do we do together that makes absolutely no sense unless Jesus is Lord? And if Jesus is Lord, what wild and crazy thing can we not help but do?

Maybe I should not be asking such question? Maybe it will give you ideas? Maybe this is just my calculating mind working to make myself righteous and not the extravagant act of love for Jesus? Maybe I should just stand here and sing - 'More Love to Thee, O Christ' or 'Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee' or 'Melt Me, Mold Me, Fill Me, Use Me'? If I sing these songs, maybe the rest of me will follow my tongue and I will be engaged in a leap of faith?

I am sure I am not to stand here and sing - so what is the extravagant act I should do for Jesus?

Maybe we should not be ask such question? Maybe it will give us ideas? Maybe this is just our calculating minds working to make ourselves righteous and not the extravagant act of love for Jesus? Maybe we should just stand together and sing - 'More Love to Thee, O Christ' or 'Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee' or 'Melt Me, Mold Me, Fill Me, Use Me'? If we sing these songs, maybe the rest of us will follow our tongues and we will be engaged in a leap of faith?

So what is the extravagant act we should do for Jesus? It is high time we do not waste the love of Jesus!

Let us pray:

Go forth as those who have made an unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ. Let us love Jesus extravagantly! Let the love of God control us - not the fear of how we look or the anxiety of what others think of us. Let the Holy Spirit set your hearts on fire. AMEN.