

*Read also 1 Samuel 16:1-13*

If you experienced a miracle; if something profoundly good happened to you, what would you do? How would you celebrate?

- Have a party?
- Take a trip?
- Go shopping?
- Go to church?

What if it was God who did His best for you? Specifically, what if Jesus Christ stepped in and you experienced an extraordinary miracle. What would you do in response?

- Have a party?
- Spread the word?
- Invite people to church?
- Have a special worship service?

Mary and Martha experienced a miracle. Jesus raised their brother from the dead. So they had a party for Jesus. Lazarus sat at the table with Him. This recovery was the greatest event of their lives. People came from miles to see Lazarus.

There were two responses to this event. As you listen to the story think about how you would respond. READ John 12:1-11

Do you ever wonder how people can see a miracle right before their eyes and not believe? It's amazing, isn't it? But Scripture teaches us that is sometimes the case. In fact, in Luke's gospel Jesus talks about what it takes to believe saying, "Some people wouldn't be convinced even if they saw a dead man rise!" (Lk 16:31). Some scholars believe Jesus was referring to Lazarus.

That is why we say in the Presbyterian Reformed faith that God calls each of those who believe. It has to be with God's help that we believe, because it is possible for all of us to have hard hearts; to shut God out; to be dead to faith. Without God's willingness to open our eyes, we might all ignore or dismiss or undercut God's presence and activity.

So I am grateful to God. With God's help we do have faith, as Mary and Martha, and we press on in faith as we pray every day for Tristan's recovery, a little boy from our congregation who has miraculously survived a fall from a third story window, and continues to improve every day. And we have faith that God will continue to act on his behalf.

While some see a miracle and yet ignore it, we want to be like Mary and Martha and Lazarus, celebrating. Far be it from us to land in the category of Judas when he said, "Don't honor Jesus," and, "Honoring Jesus with that extravagant gift is a waste. Religion is all about giving to the poor." (John 12:1-11)

That is the height of insult, is it not? Jesus just raised Lazarus from the dead and Judas one of his closest disciples is saying *do not honor Him; a gift is not in order; it is a waste of money.*

You wonder if it was at that moment that Jesus realized Judas would betray him. Or had Jesus known all along – when Judas stole from their funds? Jesus said, “You cannot serve both God and money. You will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Lk. 16:13).

We must never be in that category of faithlessness and unbelief. And Jesus took Judas' faithlessness on. He said, “You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me” (Jn. 12:8).

That means taking care of the poor is a matter of course for the believer. Helping those who have less is the everyday expression of justice for God's people. It's something we do as part of who we are. BUT, taking care of the poor is not the purpose of religion or faith or being a Christian. There is something more important than that. The purpose, reason, and ultimate expression of being a Christian is to honor Jesus Christ. And, we only have this lifetime to be a witness to Him.

In other words, if we do not honor Jesus Christ during our lifetime, it will be too late. There won't be time later. Earth is the place where we stand for what we believe.

How is your witness to Jesus Christ? Jesus said, “Religion is about honoring the Son, and thus the Father.” Now, why is this important? Let's go back to our Call to Worship as the Psalmist explains it (Ps. 45):

“Beautiful words stir my heart. I will recite a lovely poem about the king. God himself has blessed him forever. Put on your sword, O mighty warrior! You are so glorious, so majestic! Ride out to victory, defending truth, humility, and justice. Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds! God has anointed you, pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on anyone else. Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume your robes. We will bring honor to your name in every generation. **Therefore, the nations will praise you forever and ever.**”

Have we seen Jesus perform awe-inspiring deeds? We are to tell about them. When we honor Jesus Christ, our King, that is our witness which draws the nations to praise God too, forever and ever.

Helping the poor is good, and we ALWAYS have that opportunity. But honoring the Son is your opportunity; you only have **now** to express your devotion.

How will you do it? Mary, Martha, and Lazarus had a party to honor Jesus. And Mary planned, just like you might plan a party – with food, wine, and gifts. When you talk about Him, invite others to meet Him, give to Him, you do the same.

She might have thought, “I'm giving Him a gift.” If she was like me, it wouldn't be an easy decision. My husband knows that. I shop sometimes for hours, trying to find just the right thing for that special person. So I imagine that she thought and thought, and maybe she even prayed and was led to do what she did.

Mary did not begin by saying, “I only want to spend \$20.” She was absolutely lavish. She did not worry about that. She spent an entire year's salary – maybe \$80,000 to \$100,000 on this one gift of a bottle of perfume.

Now, it is possible today to spend that same amount on perfume. This picture (on power point) is of Clive Christian perfume, the most expensive perfume in the world. This bottle costs \$215,000, complete in a Baccarat crystal with a five carat diamond, Rolls Royce personal delivery.

But what Jesus had done for Mary's family was INVALUABLE to her. It was so massively important that she gave massively in response. At the high point of the party, she got out her gift and anointed Him, lavishly pouring it out on his feet and its fragrance filled the house. Everyone would have stopped in awe, as she poured it over him and wiped his feet with her hair.

This anointing first identified Him as King. Dr. George Beasley-Murray, expert in the Gospel of John, said her action was a "consecration of Jesus to royal service, that is, to a death by which the saving sovereignty comes."<sup>1</sup>

Did she realize the significance of what she did? Perhaps she did. Perhaps she put two and two together because she was the sister who sat at His feet listening. She certainly heard Him say that He would die. She very well might have gotten it. But we don't know what she knew; we only know that she acted, and it blessed Jesus. As she searched for just the right gift that would express her gratitude and love for Him, the Holy Spirit guided her to a gift that would have major significance.

That is what God does when you give.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF GIVING.

Some people reacted negatively to this gift of hers, not just Judas, but others. They reacted so negatively, as we heard that they planned to put Jesus to death, and also Lazarus as well.

We read the story of King David being anointed king. When Samuel received the order from God to go anoint this king, he knew it would be a dangerous mission and that some people would be threatened and try to kill him and David. The acts of God and Jesus Christ always divide people, so **expect it**.

Even with the threat, David was still anointed because God accomplishes His purposes. And God had plans for David. His was the kingly line of Jesus Christ thus "(his) kingdom endures forever" (Ps 45:6, 2, 17).

So Jesus was anointed, and Jesus in return honored the giver of this gift; her story is here, giving it eternal and lasting significance.

Jesus gives significance to all generous acts.

Do you want significance? Do you want to live for a higher purpose than you are now living?  
GIVE LAVISHLY.

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<sup>1</sup> George Beasley-Murray, "John" in *Word Biblical Commentary*, gen. ed. Bruce M. Metzger, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 209.

It's not about the amount; a small amount from an open heart is worth a million to Jesus. It's about having a desire to honor Jesus Christ.

There are those who prefer to lavish their assets on themselves. But in Jesus' kingdom, generosity marks the believer. We grasp the marvelous miracle of what Jesus has given to us. In hearing this story, which one are you?

AMEN