

03 April 2022, The Fifth Sunday of Lent: John 12:1-8

The anointing of Jesus' feet was unexpected in timing and extravagance. Foot washing—a practice strange to us—was common hospitality then. Wear sandals and walk everywhere for a month and you will understand why. Mary did something unexpected, unconventional, and extravagant. We, too, are to serve Christ in unexpected, unconventional, extravagant ways. We are to live God's love in every circumstance, with all persons, at all times, by all means available.

Mary's extravagance is emphasized. The large quantity of nard used was worth a laborer's yearly income. Mary also displayed personal extravagance—a wealthy woman with many servants—in the menial task of foot-anointing. It is immensely important that we give of our material resources; even more important that we give *ourselves* in service to others. If people outside the Church know nothing else our lived faith should produce an unescapable conclusion: look how those Christians give of themselves in love to one another and everyone.

God's boundless, unconventional generosity is ever-present. Our congregation knows this; I think it appropriate today I remind you of it. This Friday marks an anniversary of sorts: 10 years ago, on Palm Sunday, April 8, 2012, a group 'went out from us' leaving the communion of the Episcopal Church at Calvary to form their own gathering. I can hardly imagine the shock and pain that faithful members of Calvary experienced, the sense of betrayal, anger, and bitterness. Yet what some at the time may have thought was the worst that could happen—with good reason—was not the worst that could happen. Many of you have shared with me the struggles of those first months and years after the others left. You may not have known then, may not have been capable of knowing then, but since that tragic day God's generosity has been poured out in buckets on Calvary Church.

We believe God is unrestrained generosity to us and to all. A true Church lives three principles: First, everything, everyone is gift: the important thing is what we do with what is given us. We are to keep the blessing moving. How can anyone read the Gospels and not see this? How can anyone know anything of Jesus and not see that he welcomed the marginalized, sinful, hurting, rejected, disposable people? How can *we* sinners possibly maintain the fraud that *other* sinners are beyond God's grace? We receive God's blessing and are to live generously so that we may be blessings to others.

Second: the Church faces challenges, not crises. With a challenge God, in mercy, provides opportunities in which we may grow more deeply in God's generosity. Ten years ago the big questions were, 'How can we pay bills? How do we keep the doors open? Will we survive this terrible schism? Who will minister to us? Those who would not abandon this parish opened their hearts, minds, faith, and yes, their wallets to meet the challenges. More recently we have begun meeting the challenges of long-awaited, crucially needed renovations. Ten years ago, who could have foreseen where we are now? You need to know this and give thanks to God and one another for this fact: Just a few months ago we had a mortgage for renovations of \$400K; now our mortgage balance is about \$117K. We have no outstanding bills for any work accomplished. We have about \$135K in our Capital Campaign funds for more much-needed renovations. This congregation has faced challenges: a despotic priest, dictatorial lay-popes, abandonment by schismatics, financial trials, major renovations, and the spiritual and emotional trauma of fellow parishioners—friends—plotting destruction. And, God has showered us with blessing. Do not doubt God's generosity or the generosity of the people of Calvary Church and beyond Calvary Church.

The last principle: there are two primary signs of living God's generosity—stewardship and forgiveness. Given how I just characterized the challenges of 10 years ago this may seem inconsistent, but it is not. Forgiveness is not a superficial thing. Forgiveness only 'works' as we accept the gravity of the wrong. Otherwise, we are trying to cure cancer with a band-aid.

Forgiveness is an act of generosity, for the others' sakes and for our own. When we forgive, we release ourselves from the wrong done us, and we release the other from our desire for retribution and vindication. Forgiveness is the mirror image of repentance. When we repent, we give our sins against others to God for our healing. When we forgive, we give others' sins against us to God for our and their healing. We do not harbor sin—ours or theirs—but commend our sin, their sin, ourselves, and those who have wronged us to God's judgment, mercy, and healing, knowing that only God can turn darkness into light, tragedy into blessing, despair into hope, sin into holiness.

Dear ones in Christ, we must forgive them, even and especially if it will take a life's time, even and especially if we must forgive again and again. We must forgive to journey further into the future God's wants for us. There is no reason in the world or in heaven to hang on to the ugly past; such reasons only make sense in hell. Forgiveness is the way of generosity, God's generosity to all sinners. Forgiveness, like Mary's offering, spiritually anoints yet more Christ's Body. And the fragrance of such offering fills the world, an outward, visible sacrament of our love for Jesus.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.