

## “The Price of Grace”—John 12:1-8

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.”

How much are you willing to give for someone you really, really love? How much is that special someone worth to you? Would you give everything you have? Would you give even your life for someone you really, really love?

Obviously Jesus was someone very special to Mary, the sister of Lazarus whom he had called forth from the tomb less than a week before. Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus, valued the ointment Mary used to anoint Jesus’ feet at 300 denarii—essentially a year’s wages for a common laborer. Indeed, an extravagant gift!

Now, John doesn’t tell us exactly why Mary chose to anoint Jesus’ feet with this costly, extravagant gift. Was it her way of expressing her gratitude to Jesus for bringing her brother, who had been dead four days, back to life? Was it a way of expressing her deep love for this very dear friend? John doesn’t tell us, but maybe Mary’s motives aren’t really important here—for Jesus puts his own spin on Mary’s extravagant gift. When Judas Iscariot protests Mary’s extravagance (not out of concern for the poor, but out of concern for his own pocket), Jesus says, “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.”

Jesus wants to point his disciples—and us—to a gift even more extravagant than Mary’s costly ointment. Jesus wants to point his disciples—and us—to the greatest gift of all: the gift of himself, freely given, his Body and Blood, so that those who will accept and receive the gift would have eternal life.

That, sisters and brothers, is the price of grace—the price of God’s unearned, undeserved love and favor toward us. Now, grace is free to us—it’s offered to us as a gift. Truly we can’t earn it, and truly we don’t deserve it. There’s never enough we can do, never enough we can give, to pay the price of grace—but then, the price has already been paid. It’s already been paid by the Son of God, who offered

himself freely—no one took his life from him; he gave it up voluntarily for the world.

And what did that death buy us? For those who will accept it, it bought the forgiveness of our sins; it bought our reconciliation with God; it bought our new life, to be lived in obedience to God and in love and charity with our neighbors; and it bought for us eternal life, a new relationship with God that begins here-and-now, that goes beyond death, and that lasts forever. That's what was paid for by Jesus in giving himself as the price of grace.

On the Lord's Table today are the bread and the cup, the Body and Blood of Jesus, The bread and the cup are the Body and Blood of Jesus because he said they are—at that Last Supper with his disciples, he took bread and said, "This is my body," and he took a cup of wine and said, "This is my blood." But more than this bread and this cup being mere symbols for us of Jesus' Body and Blood, they are signs that point to the price of grace—the price he paid so that we can experience the love of God. He said, "Do this constantly to experience every time in a fresh and new way the price of grace—the price I have paid so that you can freely receive the love of my heavenly Father and yours."

Now, I could talk about how we should respond in self-giving to Jesus' self-giving for us, but I'm not going to mention it. I could talk about how, as a response to the love of the Father made real for us in the Son, we should freely offer all that we are and all that we have to God, to be used by him as he sees fit—but I'm not going to say a word about it. What I want us to do this morning is celebrate—to celebrate the love of the Father for you and for me, his poor, wayward, wandering children. I want us to celebrate God's taking the initiative to bring us rebels back home to him. I want us to celebrate the eternal life that God offers us as the gift of his unearned, undeserved love. And I want us to celebrate above all that Jesus paid for it with his Body and Blood—for that, sisters and brothers, is the price of grace. Thanks be to God!