



Full to The Brim ~ An Expansive Lent

Tuesday Small Group Session

Fifth Week of Lent – *Brazen Acts of Beauty*

Gathering /Welcome

Introduction/Background for *Full to the Brim* from Sanctified Art:

Full to the Brim reminds us to live fully—as we pursue justice and hope, or express grief and gratitude. And so, this Lent, let us trust—fully—that we belong to God. Let us increase our capacity to receive and give grace. Let us discover the expansive life God dreams for us.

Sharing the Scripture

John 12:1-8

Mary anoints Jesus' feet

12 Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table.

³ Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound,^[a] of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume.

⁴ Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, "This perfume was worth a year's wages! Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?" (⁶ He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.)

⁷ Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me."

Commentary | Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

When my son was younger, he decided the worship prelude was the perfect time to start rolling on the ground in the narthex of the sanctuary. Worshipers dressed in their Sunday best awkwardly stepped over him or winced as his speeding body hit their heels.

“Isn’t it wonderful that your son feels so comfortable here that he can move his body around to get ready for worship?!” Nothing about that moment felt wonderful. To be honest, I was mortified that he was greeting church members as an embodied obstacle course before worship. But this person’s ability to see beauty where I could not, to proclaim abundant love for who my son is and who the congregation was to be for him, was a gift ripped open for us.

The story of Mary breaking open a jar of expensive perfume is surrounded by death. Only one chapter earlier, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead at the risk of his own life. Returning to Judea and resurrecting the dead became the final actions necessary for the religious and political leaders to conspire against him. Yet here is this faithful family, welcoming and celebrating Christ as the outside world seeks to write a different story.

As people of faith, we are called to crack ourselves open, pouring out the richness of what is within to more fully worship God. We cannot hide pieces of ourselves or grasp onto expectations that distract from what God created and creates within us. We are free to bring our whole selves as a living testimony to who God has made and makes us to be, both what we label as good and that which we hide from the world.

God doesn’t need our “good” behavior. God needs our being/be-ing. Remember all of you is beautiful. Live as though you are an expensive gift from God to Creation, because surely you are.

Discussion

The theme of this Fifth Week of Lent is “Brazen Acts of Beauty”. Brazen means bold and without shame, and refers also to brass.

What brazen acts of beauty or extravagant acts of love have you witnessed in your family, at church or in the world? Have you ever been a guest in someone else’s house and received lavish hospitality? What was that like?

It was a sign of loose morals for a woman to let down her hair in public. It also would have been taboo for a woman to touch a man who was not her husband. When Mary anoints and wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair, what was she thinking? Do you think she was being intentionally brazen, or was just intensely focused?

We are told that Judas will betray Jesus and that he is a thief. Why do you think John tells us that about him?

Judas makes a sensible point: the money could have been better spent on the poor. The disciples make the same point in Matthew’s version of the story (Matt. 26:6-16). Throughout all of the gospels Jesus is obviously concerned with the cause of the poor. Why then does he disagree with Judas about Mary’s offering? What does he mean when he says we will always have the poor with us?

What other feelings or observations does this story trigger for you?

Collaborative Closing Prayer – onward to Holy Week!