

Calvary United Methodist Church
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PASSIONATE WORSHIP

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Children's Message:

John 12:1-8

I'll ask that our kids would come forward and I'll share a little time with our kids. And good morning! Okay and come on up. Get close.

A long time ago when Texas Instruments, which is a company, came out with a portable calculator, that was amazing. They used to have these big machines with big cranks and stuff like that. People who were CPAs remember those and buttons you really had to push. Now, of course, everything is Excel on computers and all that other stuff, but these are really really hand. Do you ever wonder what these buttons are? You have? Like, what is that one there? It's the squiggle line. It's the square root, like if you want to figure the square root (Child speaks.) Yeah, I've just never figured out why we need it, but, you know, if you are a mathematician you know why we need it. You're not a mathematician, you are? Well then you will do well. You will go past algebra and geometry and trigonometry and into calculus and probably all kinds of experimental physics and why not? Right? (Child speaks.) You are already doing algebra? (Child speaks.) Yeah, I think I was probably almost grown up before that happened, but anyway, this does have some nice features. But one of the most important features is this one here that says "CE". What does that mean? Clear entry, not class excused, but clear entry. So this is really cool. So let's say you want to do 77 times...oh, I meant 78, so you clear error. So, it like it never even was there, right? So let's do 99 times, see I did it again, so, well, you get the idea. Do you want to play with it? It's a dollar store one for a dollar. The first Texas Instruments calculator I had cost me \$80 and it wasn't worth much, so compared to today...

So, have you ever done something that, well, you messed up, right? You never messed up? Not yet. You will, don't worry. And did someone come back and say: You always do that, time after time after time. (No.) That happens? Do you think God is going to do that to you? "Well, wait a second," he's going to say, "Riley, I remember you doing this." Does he do that? No. God is not into guilt at all. Now, guilt is usually about the things that we do. There is something about shame when people try to shame you, trying to tell you about who you are and that's a bad thing. Sometimes you've done something wrong it is shame, but God hits the clear entry button in your life and you know what? It's gone.

So, when we just had our prayer of confession, all your sins are gone. And I like this: that God takes your sins, puts them in sea of His forgetfulness and puts up a no fishing sign. Don't fish up the past. Isn't that nice?

Now, in a friendship, if it's going to be a healthy friendship, then you can't hold on to past

hurts and grudges. You have to forgive and just move on. Do the clear entry button and it's gone because that's how God looks for you. So when they bring up the past, you say: God has taken my sins and put them in the sea of His forgetfulness and he's put up a... (No fishing sign.) Very good. That's good.

So the next time you are playing with a calculator, which do you want to take that to your seat and play with it? Okay, you can. Just remember that when we've sinned and we come before God and we say: I'm sorry, God clears the entries. And now you start all over again. But I bet your mom and dad do that too. And they hug you and they love you. Does your mom do that for you? She hugs you and she loves you if you've been bad. Have you ever been bad or just your sister? Oh, both of us. You are an honest girl. But it is all forgiven.

So, let's pray: Lord, thank you for the amazing gift of forgiveness and that you are not a bean counter holding on to all those things, you just let it go and you put in the sea of your forgetfulness so that we can move forward to the future. We ask your blessing on our kids in Christ. Amen.

Message:

It's a very similar story to the one told last week of a nameless woman who came in to where Jesus and the disciples were reclining at the house of a Pharisee, but the context is a little different and the story is a little bit different and it speaks to passionate worship as does the story from Isaiah 6 that Steve read earlier. So would you join with me in a word of prayer: Oh, Lord, help us to hear from you but tune us in to you that our passion for you would be strong and our passion to worship you be pure. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Now, each of the four Gospels do tell the story of a woman who enters a dinner party, washes Jesus' feet with her tears and anoints his feet with oil. But John gives the woman a name. Her name is Mary. And, he places it at a different location. This is at the house of Lazarus in Bethany, Martha and Mary's brother, newly raised from the dead. And John draws some additional things from this story that the other three Gospels don't. So in this dinner party, as you know, Mary, who is a wonderful cook, sets a splendid table an invitation not to be missed if you are going to go. In this dinner party the men gather with the men, the women gather to serve, but not Mary, which is something that always irritates Martha. But Mary wants to be where Jesus is, even though it is a place reserved only for the menfolk. But Mary doesn't care. She sat down before Jesus' feet. She has listened to him. She's heard him teach. It got into her heart. It began to change her life. In this particular instance, she enters and does something no one is prepared for. She takes off her head wrapping. She lets her hair down in front of all these men. She kneels at Jesus' feet. She takes a small bottle of perfumed oil so expensive it would cost a year's pay for a working man. And the people stare in horror at what she is doing. The whole room just is filled with the spicy scents of this perfume which would be something of bergamot and cardamom and rose and jasmine. And the waste sort of shocks everybody. And the next thing she does is even more bizarre. She bows down over

his feet, wipes them tenderly with her hair and this awkward silence takes place until Judas mutters under his breath: If she was just going to waste this money, why not give it to the poor? And that's when Jesus responds: Leave her alone. You always have the poor with you, but you do not have me.

So, what is really going on and how does this meet us here on this first Sunday in spring here in 2019? Well, Mary has stepped far out of the bounds of convention into the territory of scandal, that Mary's actions are actually the tenderness of a married couple, not an unmarried man and woman who don't have that kind of relationship. And caressing someone's feet, that's not done outside the bedroom. Why the tears? So the familiarity of Mary's actions is astounding, it's embarrassing for those witnessing this intimacy. Judas is outraged. But Mary knows something the rest of them don't and she is actually acting the part of a prophet because no one is facing up to what is going to happen even though all the signs are right there and she stepped far out of the bounds of convention into scandal to do this.

So, what's going on between them, first of all, is that Mary has fallen in love with Jesus. Now, I'm not talking about the romantic kind of love, the gushy love, the puppy love. This is a much deeper kind of love. She is acknowledging something that not even Jesus' three closest friends want to face. She knows he is going to die and Jesus acknowledges that. And she knows that his sacrifice is going to be something far different than any other sacrifice, certainly from what they know of what goes on in the temple and certainly of what they know of what goes on in the Roman world; which is why she is boldly going to enter the room where only menfolk are allowed, which is why she is going to weep and her tears will wash Jesus' feet. And why she would take something so expensive that it's actually reserved for her own burial and she'll anoint Jesus' feet with it. And she is the first one ever to get who Jesus really is. She is the first one to get what he is going to do and what he will do on the cross when no one else wants to do this. And her action comes from the heart that worships with passion this man who has changed her life.

And let me suggest to you that passionate worship comes from a heart in love with Jesus. Now, the word worship is an important word, but it is an English word, it is fairly simple, old English. It means worth ship. This is something that is worthy and that which is of ultimate importance to you will be that which you will place as priority, which you will do something important with.

Now you know what people worship and I do too. People worship money; they worship fame; they worship sex; they worship rock stars; they worship cars. It is an endless list of things that people will worship, but note that the operate word is things because the things that we worship will die, they will disappear, they will rust or rot away; that anything you or I worship that is temporal, is it really worth it in the long run? Judas worshipped money. Peter worshipped power. James and John worshipped status. Everybody worships something, but Mary worshipped someone and therein lies the difference. She would walk with him. He touched her life. He had changed it. She got the truth of it and the Gospel says in effect, the

men never get it, only the women do. Some of you should really be glad about that. The men weren't paying attention. It's what makes the Bible so original and so unique that women are always given a place with God. They are not back in the kitchen, not second class.

I did go to a church once where the women weren't allowed in the kitchen. All the men cooked, and they were good cooks and all the women didn't complain. It was fine with them.

Mary was committed to Jesus and she gave herself and all she had to him. That's how committed she was. And that was what Jesus was asking of those who followed him and certainly of his disciples. Their commitment to him. Later on on the night that Jesus was betrayed and was arrested, they all ran away because their worship was that shallow. Mary's worship was that deep. She had listened to Jesus' teachings. They had energized her life. But she also heard the path that he must travel and his warnings about that and she wept at the sacrifice that he was going to do for her, for everyone, and she is lovingly preparing him for that, actually for his burial.

So, she grieves openly because she shares in his suffering. She is one in heart with him. Judas, he is resentful because he is a thief and the pattern of Judas' life was always one of betrayal: the betrayal of trust, the hoarding of treasure. He is in it for himself. And Judas, instead of following the example of Christ in his self-giving, he's really uncomfortable with Mary's display of devotion because it is catching him up short. And when Mary gives, Judas takes and hoards. When Mary sacrifices, Judas only sees what is in for me. And what Judas critiques as waste is in fact the greatest gift that Mary can give and it's not an expensive perfume or the money thereof; it's the offering of herself and everything she has to him, given in service to Jesus, that she is worshipping him and passionately.

Now, there are a lot of ways to style worship. You can sing with the Mennonites a cappella. You can jam with a praise band. You can kneel. You can bow. You can genuflect. You can lift your hands. You can sit in silence with the Quakers; speak in tongues with the Pentecostals, however you want to do it. There are many ways of structuring a worship service, but passionate worship is the quality you bring to it. And it comes from the heart. And it comes from a heart that has known Jesus walked with him.

Now, what makes our worship authentic is the heart and soul we pour into it, which is why this Gospel story is not simply a story of one woman's devotion to Jesus. It is actually a call to our intimate devotion to him, to trust him, to walk with him, to give ourselves to him.

Way, way back when Shirley had our first child, Kate, it was 1982 and I was an assistant pastor. I wasn't making a lot of money, by any means and Shirley was working, but we decided, well, daycare was not as big a deal as it is now nor as easy to get, but that she should stay home and we would just make the sacrifice. So I remember preparing to meet with the leaders of the church about my salary and I worked up all these figures and was going to show

them how much worth I was to them and all this and I presented all that at the meeting and then they dismissed me and I got back and they said: Yeah, we really like you. We are going to give you \$10 a week. I was so mad. I can't tell you how mad I was. I was just like crest-fallen at first and then I was as mad as a mud hen because I was going to need a lot more than \$10 a week. So the next day, I took the day off and I went to a part in York County, Nixon Park if anybody has been there. I walked around and I was muttering under my breath. I was kicking stones. I was just so angry. I was thinking I should just quit. I could do all kinds of things, you know. And one of the things that I do when I'm really frustrated is I go to some lake or a pond and I'll skip stones. I skipped so many stones there I think I filled it halfway up. And then finally I just put all my energy into this one flat rock and I skipped that baby 18 times. That's when I said: you must be really mad. And I thought: but 18 times! I've never done that. And you know, it kind of brought me back to reality, so I walked a trail that was pretty remote and I sat down and I said: I'm yours and if \$10 a week is all it is, then I'm going to do that because that is your call to me and I'll just trust you. And I remember just putting my arms up like this and my eyes closed. And about ten feet behind me some guy said: what are you doing? I didn't want to say I'm worshipping; I should have but I just looked at him funny. He thought: he needs pills. But it just came from the heart and you know, God met us and God did something and it actually changed my course of ministry over the next several months and we got the money that we needed. It was really quite amazing. He wanted my heart and that's what that was and that heart has to trust.

So, what makes our worship real is that heart. It's a call beyond the emotionally absent kind of following of Judas or the other men around Jesus whom we often mirror. Now if you come to the worship service to be lifted by the music, it will probably happen but it's not enough. If the familiarity of the liturgy is comforting, that's nice, but it's not enough. If the preaching is good, it's your spiritual vitamin pill for the week, that's not enough either. And if that's all it is, we miss the point of worship and it only reflects the hollowness within. You know, this is what I think: If you walk with Him through the week, if you listen quietly for His voice in reading the Bible, you know the first commandment going back into the Jewish tradition is: Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God as one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind and strength. And that first word is "Hear". Listen. It is not speak. It's hear. But if you'll do that, if you prepared your heart to receive from him, if you took ten minutes on a Saturday night before going to bed and prayed over the worship service or sat in the morning with your tea or your coffee just quietly and let God speak to you to prepare you for worship, I think that your experience of worship would be real and authentic and actually transforming because it will be passionate and you'll find the presence of Jesus manifest not only to you but to the whole church. It will just be kind of joyfully popping around and that joyful thing just happens unexpectedly. When you worship with passion the joyfully unexpected is much more likely to take place.

So, passion comes from love. Loving what you do, loving those who you know and that passionate worship opens itself, pours itself out, like a fragrant perfume, this offering of love to Jesus who has done everything for you and me. And the smell of such sweet perfume amidst

the stench of the betrayal, the jealousy, the looming violence of our world. We long for this sweet fragrance in worship, but it can happen here. It does happen here.

What Mary had to offer to Jesus is simply what we all have to offer: our heart. And when you put your heart in it, worship is so passionate, but let me ask: if it's not, what keeps you from being a person of passionate worship?

Let us pray: So, Lord, for the grace of this day, for the story that gets inside us, for your love that has changed us, thank you. Show us, teach us, open us up to be people of passion for you. Amen