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November 9, 2025

Scripture: John 12: 1-8

Sermon Title: Grace, Grief, and Gratitude

John 12:1-8

Mary Anoints Jesus

12 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii 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 kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it[b] so that she might keep it for the

day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Prayer...

Introduction:

Growing up as a Presbyterian within the Reformed tradition of the Church, I learned early on that one of our favorite words is grace. Grace is at the heart of my understanding of the Gospel. As I have been highlighting lately, grace means unmerited favor. It is the unconditional love of God in all circumstances. Grace is not overly permissive. Grace is extravagant love but has its wisdom and includes boundaries to maintain healthy living. For me grace is always a good word. You cannot receive too much grace. Grace is really the nature of God who keeps pursuing us with love even when we try to resist her embrace. Our Loving God patiently and persistently seeks us out until we allow her motherly presence to

heal our souls. I often remind us that grace is what we always need and when we are hurting most, we need more grace not less. When we struggle with sin or wallow in grief, grace is God's presence of love to hold us and offer us forgiveness if needed, guidance in our action, and deep comfort.

Our story from John's gospel today includes grace, grief, and gratitude.

Where do we see grace in this story? Where do we see God's unconditional love?

We see grace is Mary as she washes Jesus' feet with costly perfume. She is extravagant in her love. She is showing love to her friend and rabbi Jesus. Remember Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are some of Jesus' closest friends. At the time of this story, Jesus has already raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus receives Mary's expression of grace even though others wonder why she is wasting all of that expensive perfume. Jesus knows that there is a purpose in her

baptism of perfume over his feet. For soon those same feet will be pierced with a nail on the cross. Jesus is aware in this story that he will give his life out of love and he in his human need receives her gift of love and compassion. Jesus returns grace with grace. He returns the love he receives with love of his own. Mary and Jesus share an intimate moment of connection as she wipes his feet with her hair.

Where do we see grief in this story?

In our passage, it is mentioned that Mary has bought the perfume, so that she may keep it for the day of his burial. I wonder since Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are close friends of Jesus whether he has mentioned to them his worries related to his upcoming sacrifice. There is a melancholy feel in this story and I think his close friends understand what Jesus is going to face. Judas Iscariot seems confused with Jesus' behavior and more critical, but this shows in some ways Judas' own grief becomes he is struggling and will

eventually in his pain betray Jesus. In the midst of grief around this dinner table, there is an expression of love by Martha in providing the meal and Mary lovingly caring for Jesus. Lazarus is also there supporting his friend Jesus.

Finally, in this story where do we see gratitude?

Similarly to what we have already shared, gratitude is shown by those around the table enjoying a meal together. Gratitude is found in the love shown to Jesus by Mary. And Jesus expresses his gratitude to Mary for her preparation of him for his upcoming burial. Lazarus and Martha are grateful for Jesus as well. Certainly Lazarus is grateful that Jesus raised him from the dead.

This morning I want to remind us that in this season of November as we prepare our hearts for Thanksgiving in a few weeks, we can remember that gratitude flows from the grace offered to us in the gift of love from Jesus. Like Mary, we can show love as well to Jesus. We

can remember Jesus' sacrifice of love for us and join Mary in displaying our affection for Jesus in some way.

How might we express our gratitude to our Loving God? We can worship God. We can spend time developing a close personal relationship with God. If that is a new concept for you to think of God as a close friend, may I suggest that prayer can be a like a date with God. As most of you know, I am the dad for two daughters Cate and Chiara. In addition to making time for dates with my wife Karen- which Karen will tell you we need more of, I try to also have regular dates with my daughters. We usually grab a drink of some kind and hang out at a coffee shop or outside in nature. When I think of a date, I think of a time where we can have fun and be honest and real with each other. It is a time of connection. In the same way I connect to my daughters, God our Heavenly parent and personal friend wants to connect with us. When we pray, we share our feelings with God and when we listen even in the silence, we can feel and hear

God over time. It takes practice and intention, but God has a way of speaking to us and caring for us in our need. God has a way of compelling us to also act as her ambassadors of love in this world.

One tangible way we are inviting you to be an ambassador of love in November is with a diaper drive for A Family Place, which has a preschool that supports low income families. We regularly invite our church community to be the hands and feet of Jesus in meaningful ways. Our mission flows from gratitude. Thankfully Jesus also meets us in our grief.

As I think about the topic of grief today, I am reminded that life feels very fragile at times. Grief these days feels like a normal experience that comes at us in different ways. Grief can be the experience of losing a loved one. In our own experience within our church community, we have had two memorials of cherished members of our congregation and today we will have a third memorial as we remember Bob and Libbi's beautiful daughter Savannah. Grief

related to loss of life is one major experience we all feel deeply.

Grief may also come to us related to a loss of a relationship, or a job, or a physical ability. Grief these days for many of us is connected to local, national, and world events. Many of us are grieving the plight of immigrants. For example this last week more immigrants in Newberg were detained. We are seeking to support the families and individuals impacted and we're grateful for Kat McNeal, Cherice Bock, Unidos, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, IMIRJ- which stands for Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, Together Lab, and other individuals and groups leading efforts to support the immigrant community.

Next week on Tuesday we celebrate Veterans Day and this day of recognition is also a time to grieve the struggles in our world related to war and other expressions of violence. Veterans Day is ultimately a reminder to work and pray for peace and to seek a day when wars will be no more.

Friends, I am grateful that our church community is like a family. Together we experience grace, grief, and gratitude. We share these feelings with each other and seek comfort, guidance, and empowerment from our Loving God. We follow a God who understands our pain and cares for us with unconditional love. We do not shy away from the struggles of life, but we support each other in tangible ways.

In this season of gratitude during the month of November, may we open our hearts to Jesus and remember the example of Mary in our story today. May we express our affection and love to Jesus, share in his sufferings, and receive of his goodness. I want to finish today with a short song I wrote about resting in the love and grace of God.

Rest in God's love

Rest in God's grace

Rest in God's love today (Repeat)

Simply be

Simply be

God is here

God is now

God is love (Repeat)

AMEN