

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Healing

Scripture: John 12:1-11

March 21st, 2021

"Healing the World: For God so Loved the World"

Last week we focused on the theme of seeking justice and looked at how restorative justice, the justice we see in the Bible, is spread throughout our communities, our world, and our daily lives. We used the prophetic words of the prophet Micah to dig a little deeper into this concept of restorative justice to understand some ways on how we practice this as Christians. This week we will look at the theme of healing our world through the story of Mary anointing Jesus with the oils and perfumes by washing Jesus' feet with her hair.

The story Rev. George shares this week to illustrate healing is the story of Saint Gregory of Narek. I confess, I did not know anything of Saint Gregory of Narek until reading this book. He is most famous for his *Book of Lamentations*, not the Book of Lamentations found in the Bible, but it was a separate book of a collection of his own prayers. In reading just a few of these prayers, you see a man who is deeply troubled by the violence and destruction he sees in the world around him, but at the same time, he sees the beauty of life surrounding him as he journeys on through his life as a monk. His *Book of Lamentations* is comparable to the book written by Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, where St. Augustine describes the collapse of the Roman Republic through his grief and sorrow of how things have transpired, but he captures his hope for the future all the while describing this deep-seeded pain. Here is an excerpt of one of Saint Gregory's prayers.

"Every part of my body from head to toe is unhealthy

And beyond the help of physicians.

But you, merciful, beneficent, blessed

Long-suffering, immortal king,

Heart the prayers of my embattled heart for mercy

In my time of need (Prayer 18, Section K).

Prayers, especially prayers in the moment, from the heart, are often a reflection of what is taking place inside our inner selves as we express our grief, joy, pain, or love. Rev. George says this, "Gregory's illness did not keep him from expressing spiritual depth, anguish, and assurance. Though the heart and the soul of Gregory were wounded, his wounds did not distract the saint from showing forgiveness, healing, mercy, love and grace (Hovanness-Donigian p 86). Our prayers are simply the springs of love and pain bubbling to the surface of our being, bursting forth from our hearts as we experience our lives through our emotions. Our prayers are a part of who we are and what we experience in the world.

I experienced this during my time in Denver. When my father called me to tell me that he was going to die, I did not know what to do. I did what I had always done and pushed that confusion, that anger, that pain, deep inside my soul and hid it from my colleagues, my family, and my friends. It was not until one day a couple months later I nearly had a panic attack while talking on the phone to a work colleague about an issue at church. The next time he saw me, he sat me down and said he knew I was not telling him something. I was going to tell him right then no matter how long it took. I confessed the pain I had pushed deep within me and what my father had said to me. He said he had known something was wrong with me because he could just feel it each time, he spoke with me following the service on Sunday. That day gave me the courage to begin sharing this with others which would eventually lead me to stepping down from my dream job at the Evanston Center for Spiritual Wholeness and Healing, leaving the city of Denver I had fallen in love with, and dropping out of Iliff School of Theology to take time to heal. I learned an important lesson that day though, which was speak from your scars, not your wounds.

I imagine Mary felt something similar to my colleague with the story of Mary washing Jesus' feet. She sensed something painful and tragic was about to happen. Instead of forcing Jesus to share this pain and impending doom with her, she instead takes awfully expensive perfumes and oils to wash Jesus' feet. Let us read that story.

John 12:1-11

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 at the table with him. **3** 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. **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 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.”

The Plot to Kill Lazarus

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Jesus and his disciples are celebrating the life of Lazarus as Jesus had just raised him from the dead. They are sharing a meal with Lazarus and his family. Without anyone asking, Mary gets up and takes an extremely expensive bottle of perfume and begins washing Jesus’ feet. She humbly uses her hair to dry Jesus’ feet first and then washes his feet with this beautiful smelling perfume. This is significant because in Middle Eastern culture, touching another person’s feet is a deep sign of reverence. Think of how gross our feet can get after running around on the farm barefoot in the mud, dirt, and clay, and let’s not forget Jesus’ feet were probably pretty gross considering he would have traditionally wore sandals and they didn’t have a public transit, uber drivers, or their own personal vehicle to drive them around the countryside and cities. Regardless of walking on their feet all day, Mary shows her humble service to Jesus by drying and washing his feet.

Judas becomes infuriated and has quite an interesting discourse between him and Jesus. Judas claims the money they could have used from selling that perfume would have fed the poor of the town! Jesus, like Mary, knows this is more symbolic than anything. He tells Judas to leave her be and that she is preparing his body for his burial. Jesus also reminds Judas the poor will always be there to feed, however, Jesus will only be there with them for a brief amount of time. Mary knew Jesus was wrestling with something more than what he was letting on and she responded by serving him.

In the final verses of this section, it becomes quite clear Jesus has angered many people. Many of the chief priests are fed up with Jesus

disobeying their specific laws and practices and are even plotting to kill Lazarus to get back at Jesus. It has become clear Jesus' days are becoming numbered as he has amassed a following of believers willing to follow him to challenge the Roman Empire's hegemony and oppression. Many people are now calling themselves followers of Jesus and this is concerning to the establishment, status quo of Jewish leadership and, eventually, Roman leadership.

Today's story is important because it shows that to heal we have to be able to respond to those around us. Mary responds by showing Jesus her love by her reverence to Jesus. Mary responds by being an example of love, compassion, justice, and grace to Jesus. Mary responds by being the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We all heal in different ways, but I healed through my father's death because I took care of cats. When I briefly moved home to Tennessee following my time in Denver before moving to Tampa, Florida, I healed by taking care of our kittens. We had three rescues. Lucky, because we thought he was the only cat of his litter to survive, Kiera, the Irish word for beautiful, as her black coat shone beautifully in the light, and Turtle, our crippled little kitty who crawls on her belly like a baby sea turtle but can do anything any other cat can do! Those cats gave me purpose and meaning as I took care of them and discovered their personalities as they grew up. We grew together in love, friendship, and they helped heal my soul as I once again found something to take care of and serve.

Wherever you may be on this day, friends, I hope you give yourself the space to heal. There are many things in this world that will tell you they need your time and need you to respond right now. However, respond when you are ready. Speak and love through your scars, not your wounds. We all have scars buried deep within our soul and we all have scars visible for the world to see. Never be ashamed of those scars because they have made you into the beautiful child of God we all see and love today. Be compassionate to yourselves and others. Seek justice for others and let others seek justice for you. In your times of doubt and anger, remember the words of Paul in Romans 12:9-16, 21.

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **16** Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

In the name of Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer of Life, Amen.