

03.24.24

“Amazing Love”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

John 12:1-16 (CEV)

¹ Six days before Passover Jesus went back to Bethany, where he had raised Lazarus from death. ² A meal had been prepared for Jesus. Martha was doing the serving, and Lazarus himself was there.

³ Mary took a very expensive bottle of perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. She wiped them with her hair, and the sweet smell of the perfume filled the house.

⁴ A disciple named Judas Iscariot was there. He was the one who was going to betray Jesus, and he asked, ⁵ “Why wasn't this perfume sold for 300 silver coins and the money given to the poor?” ⁶ Judas did not really care about the poor. He asked this because he carried the moneybag and sometimes would steal from it.

⁷ Jesus replied, “Leave her alone! She has kept this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me.”

A Plot to Kill Lazarus

⁹ A lot of people came when they heard that Jesus was there. They also wanted to see Lazarus because Jesus had raised him from death. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus. ¹¹ He was the reason that many of the people were turning from them and putting their faith in Jesus.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem ([Matthew 21.1-11](#); [Mark 11.1-11](#); [Luke 19.28-40](#))

¹² The next day a large crowd was in Jerusalem for Passover. When they heard that Jesus was coming for the festival, ¹³ they took palm branches and went out to greet him. They shouted,

“Hooray!
God bless the one who comes
in the name of the Lord!
God bless the King
of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a donkey and rode on it, just as the Scriptures say,

¹⁵ “People of Jerusalem,
don't be afraid!
Your King is now coming,
and he is riding
on a donkey.”

¹⁶ At first, Jesus' disciples did not understand. But after he had been given his glory, they remembered all this. Everything had happened exactly as the Scriptures said it would.

Leader: These are the Words of God!

All: Thanks be to God!

John 13:1-17 (The Message)

¹⁻² Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come to leave this world to go to the Father. Having loved his dear companions, he continued to love

them right to the end. It was suppertime. The Devil by now had Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, firmly in his grip, all set for the betrayal.

³⁻⁶ Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So, he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. When he got to Simon Peter, Peter said, “Master, you wash my feet?”

⁷ Jesus answered, “You don’t understand now what I’m doing, but it will be clear enough to you later.”

⁸ Peter persisted, “You’re not going to wash my feet—ever!”

Jesus said, “If I don’t wash you, you can’t be part of what I’m doing.”

⁹ “Master!” said Peter. “Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!”

¹⁰⁻¹² Jesus said, “If you’ve had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you’re clean from head to toe. My concern, you understand, is holiness, not hygiene. So now you’re clean. But not every one of you.” (He knew who was betraying him. That’s why he said, “Not every one of you.”) After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table.

¹²⁻¹⁷ Then he said, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as ‘Teacher’ and ‘Master,’ and rightly so. That is what I am. So, if I, the Master, and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet. I’ve laid down a pattern for you. What I’ve done, you do. I’m only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn’t give orders to the employer. If you understand what I’m telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.

Leader: These Words of Jesus Are for Us, Church. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Triumphant God, we praise you and your amazing love. We thank you for sending your son, Jesus, to teach us, lead us, and suffer for us. As we enter the stories leading up to Holy Week, help us to hear your voice and message of a love beyond all comparison. We love you too Lord, even if we sometimes don’t show it sacrificially. Thank you, Lord, for your example of humility and extravagant generosity. Motivate us to demonstrate your amazing love with the stranger as well as with those we love. Please speak through this messenger this morning. Amen.

Happy Palm Sunday! Hosanna! Let us all say Hosanna! Hosanna!

We may feel more like the crowd who welcomed Jesus back into

Jerusalem, because spring has sprung, and Easter is coming! And yet, you

probably feel mixed emotions of joy with sadness of what is to come this week. For my childhood history, Easter was only joy and excitement for an Easter egg hunt at home and on the church lawn, candy, gifts, and new spring clothes. Not until I attended the services as an adult on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday did I fully understand what we were celebrating. We will prepare ourselves more seriously on Good Friday, of course, so that we're ready for the big celebration next Resurrection Sunday! Please sign up so we know how much food to have. I also encourage you to catch up on your devotional booklet this week. There are one or two booklets left out on the little hall table if you did not receive one.

There are three stories or situations of "Amazing Love" read in today's Scriptures, hence my sermon title. Since they are all familiar, I will simply draw your attention to them and ask you to go home and ponder the love theme in each, reflecting how that might change your view of Easter this year.

It was six days before the Passover, and Jesus went to dinner in Bethany at his friend, Lazarus' house. Lazarus' sister, Martha, served the meal, and Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with pure nard, a fragrant oil from roots and stems of an herb from India. It is "also known as Spikenard [and] is made from the roots of the *Nardostachys jatamansi* plant native to the Himalayas. The plant is steam distilled to extract the precious essential oil, which has a strong, earthy fragrance often associated with luxury (<https://perfumeson.com/what-is-pure-nard-made-of-exploring-the-ingredients-and-benefits>).” It was also used for its

medicinal benefits as a stress reliever, much like Biofreeze is used on sore muscles, and was used in religious rituals or as a luxury perfume.

What made it seem extravagant to Judas and others was the large amount of it (it was a pint!), how it was packaged in a beautiful sealed alabaster jar, and how expensive it was. This lavish gift Mary bestowed on Jesus was given in gratitude for how Jesus restored their brother Lazarus back to life! Judas, of course, objected to the unnecessary waste of 300 denarii (or \$832 in today's money). That nard could have been sold and the money could have been utilized to feed and clothe the poor, Judas argued. Jesus is still teaching his disciples even six days from his death and resurrection: “⁸ You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me.” But how many times do we ask ourselves similar questions about spending decisions? Here at the church, we have even deferred maintenance in the past for good reasons, but recently, we are gathering estimates to repair or replace big items so that we can continue our mission to the community! We'll keep you updated as required. Back to the story: Judas wasn't yet considered the bad guy; remember he was the trusted treasurer who was accountable for their money. He was just unaware of Jesus' role as Christ, the Messiah, or his own role of betrayer. Jesus loved his disciples, and he especially loved Mary of Bethany and this family, so he received their gift with love, saying she could save the rest for his burial. Another foreshadowing of what was coming in a few days.

This gospel says Jesus found the young colt to ride on, whereas the Synoptics all say he asks his disciples to find the donkey. This emphasis is subtle, but since it is in John, we know that it points to Christ as

Messiah and leader-servant, rather than teacher. John's book is more about Christology of Jesus, and his role as Spiritual Leader, Savior, and Messiah. It is John's presentation of the beginning of the Passion as Jesus **consents** to his journey to Jerusalem and actually facilitates it by choosing a donkey of humble origin rather than a mighty stallion to ride in like a kingly warrior. The followers in the hundreds and thousands do not understand the subtle message, but I hope we do. This humility is another example of Christ's amazing love for his people and for generations to come like us. It is not about the palm branches and accolades, but about his willingness to journey to his fate. It is a visual symbol of leadership AND legitimacy for his disciples later to recall.

John also takes us directly to the upper room and we will read for our Maundy Thursday/Good Friday combined meal, communion, and service. Luke's gospel is the one to read for a chronology of the Passion; for us, we'll focus on the preparation and washing of feet in John. Again, another story of amazing, sacrificial love to prepare us for his ultimate sacrifice. You already know that foot washing was necessary after any journey because it is a dusty geography, and men wore sandals. Typically, this was done by a servant of the household, but Jesus was serving as host in this room just like the communion bread is called "The Host" it represents Jesus' body broken for you. Here the host is also the servant who will journey to the cross, be tried, imprisoned, flogged, and crucified. The whole bathing discussion foreshadows Peter's future denial of Christ at Pilate's home where he defends himself as not a believer, and the rooster crowed three times as Jesus predicted. The "washing all of me" represents Peter's guilt need to cleanse his heart of any previous

doubts he had in Jesus' role as Messiah, Christ's perfection versus his sinfulness, and trying to understand Jesus' forgiveness of Peter's sin. This foot washing story should speak to all of us as well. Jesus' act and explanation was one of amazing love to a man, Peter, he calls the rock and foundation of his church. Jesus becomes the ultimate example of servant leadership in community that his disciples are to emulate. If they do as he did in their lives and community, his teachings will bear fruit and his death will have meaning. Like our key verses from Philippians 4:8-9:

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. ^{NIV}

Of course, the disciples do not yet understand, but they will next week. Hope to see you then to hear more of the story! Bring a friend or loved one to learn more on Friday at noon (we'll have plenty of food), and on Sunday at Sunrise with NBMBC, to Bible Study at 9:30 and to the main Worship service at 11:00 am. Our purpose and mission are to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who do not know him. Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray.

Oh God of forgiveness, we thank you for the gospel stories to help illustrate your love, your will, and important teachings. We need to place ourselves in the stories, so help our imaginations to do that especially this Holy week! Give us courage and amazing love to invite others to come with us to hear the Gospel and to receive you again or perhaps for the first time. May we pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.**