

All right, can we refocus? Now, we talked about the schedule for Holy Week, which isn't this week, but next week, and it gives us a lot of opportunity to prepare ourselves for Easter to celebrate the death and the resurrection of Christ. A couple of weeks ago, I preached on our relationship with the Lord being a heart matter, if you recall, underscoring the fact that we confess with our mouth, but we believe with our hearts. And when we go to trust in the Lord, we do it with all of our hearts. And the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength, mind and soul.

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Right. And love your neighbor as yourself. So Diane then preached last week a wonderful message on celebrating that nobody is excluded from receiving God's grace and forgiveness, not even the most evil among us, if they will humble themselves and ask for forgiveness. She used the illustration of Christ changing his plans with us in deference to some scammer who had decided that he was now wanting forgiveness. The nerve of him.

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And we're now invited to the party, a celebration of God's mercy and grace, which includes you and me and the scammers. At the end of her message, she asked pointedly, how will you answer the invitation? What is your RSVP going to look like? I want to pick up from there as we go through the gospel reading for today. It was six days before Passover, and Jesus and his disciples had been invited to a dinner party at the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

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Oh, the guy that he had just raised from the dead very recently. And there were people there in a house that I think was well appointed. These folks had means be kind of like going to some of the houses around here where they had the really long tables that could accommodate 20 or 25 people. So that's what's in my mind when I think of this dinner party that they were having. Martha is of course serving with no doubt all of her servants.

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Lazarus is at the table enjoying his new lease on life. And as the host probably was near or next to Jesus and Mary. What was Mary doing?

She does something quite unusual and for the time, one could say even outlandish. She took a very expensive perfume of pure nard.

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And for those of you that have ever bought perfume, you know that there are different intensities of perfume, right? There's the toilet water, which is usually the least expensive. Expensive, but doesn't last very long. And there's the mid range. And then there's the intense.

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This was the ultra intense. It was pure nard.

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It was so expensive that when Judas said, why didn't you sell that for 300 denarii? He was referring to an entire year's wage. So. So Mary took this very expensive perfume and she anointed Jesus feet and wiped them with her hair. This was an amazing, scandalous act of worship.

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Let's look at it. First we see that Mary's belief in Christ has now become a conviction. She knew about Jesus, now she knows Jesus. A belief can change. Oh, I believe that's.

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Well, maybe that's not true. Yeah, you can convince me that's not true. But a conviction is non negotiable. Once you get to a point where I am convicted about this, you're willing to go to the hill to die for that thing that is just non negotiable. And that's where Mary had come to.

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Mary not only believed in her heart and confessed with her mouth that Jesus was Lord, she now put it into active worship. This belief was now firmly held an unwavering conviction. Now there was a personal investment also after witnessing Jesus raise her brother from the dead. Can we just pause for one second? I want you to imagine a family member passing away.

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He's in the morgue. He's in one of those, you know, chill places. And after four days, somebody invites you to come down to the morgue. They slide your loved one out and they say, get up. And they do, right?

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There is definitely a sense of awe that Mary now holds for Jesus, who had done that publicly with her brother.

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Now, with her relationship with Jesus, it has led her to worship with deep conviction. So the first thing we noticed about Mary's act of worship that is done with deep conviction. Mary was now more than ever convinced that this was the Messiah. Recognizing who Jesus was caused her to humble herself, to get on her knees and not only touch his feet, something that was left for the very lowly of servants because of all the filth and dirt that one would get on their feet after walking around, but she did it with her hair, which in her day was considered a sign of glory and dignity. So in doing this, she demonstrated extraordinary humility, placing her honor and her glory at the service of worshiping Jesus.

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May our worship come not just from a head knowledge of Jesus, but a conviction of knowing who Jesus is and what he's done for you and me. That he says what he says he's going to do, he says he will do. And he does it. And in return we're willing to give him everything like Mary did. Secondly, her trust in Jesus was so solidly unmovable that she trusted Jesus so much.

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She worshiped not only with a deep conviction, but with abandon and confidence. What a joy, right? Not to just hesitantly go into something, but believe in it so much that you just throw everything at it. Besides Judas, who for selfish motives criticized her for using what could have been used to help the poor and line his own pockets, she undoubtedly would face criticism from neighbors and friends as well. NARD was a luxury item, and she had used it to do what with?

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To anoint feet. Are you crazy, girl? That's expensive stuff. What are you doing? And you did it with your hair.

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Ew, that's disgusting.

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Yeah, she used a whole pound of it. And I see her as being confidently in a state of abandon worshipping. He is worth more than my everything. She might have said, nothing is too good for my Jesus. Because you understand when you fall in love with Jesus, you'll do anything for him.

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Nard was used sparingly and only for the most special occasions. By using a pound of it on Jesus, she expressed her faith in Jesus as the Messiah, valuing him above any criticism or worldly possessions she might have. Romans 12:1 says, Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your true and proper worship. When our belief becomes conviction and our trust is so deep that there is nothing we will not do for God, then our hearts and bodies become living sacrifices and are holy and pleasing.

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To God able to give true and proper worship with abandon and conviction. Thirdly, Mary's love for Jesus was such that there was not only a deep conviction behind it, but a quiet confidence that allowed for a prophetic quality to her worship. Remember when Judas complained? Jesus turned to Judas and said what? He said, leave her alone.

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She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.

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Spices were commonly used in burying the dead to mask the odor. But let's understand. Jesus knew where he was going. He knew what this week held for him. He knew he was going to the cross.

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When we love the Lord our God with all of our hearts and with all of our soul and with all of our mind, we not only answer the greatest commandment with obedience, we unlock the ability to worship with deep adoration and humility. And in doing so, let's not forget about Jesus point of view here. How might he be feeling about what is happening? He's on the way to the Cross and he knows it. And Mary knows that he is the Son of God now and that he can do amazing things and has done amazing things.

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Her family and she's grateful that he is in their lives. Maybe she doesn't know everything. The Lord has been trying to tell them all, I am going to die. I'm not going to be with you. And maybe it sunk in, maybe it didn't.

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But by her personal devotion and worship, she affirms his divinity and his mission. Can you imagine, has this ever happened to you where you really feel strong, that you're supposed to do something and then you begin to chicken out and then the Lord does something to remind you, hey, I'm with you. You got this. You're right on the money here. Don't give up.

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That's what Mary did for Jesus by anointing him with this nard and by doing it with her hair, giving him a moment, comfort and solace in his full humanness. I can only begin to imagine how much that meant to him. More than just a disciple, Mary showed her deep personal connection with Jesus. A relationship marked by love, trust and reverence that would have meant a lot to him. As this time drew near.

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Well, good news. This kind of relationship with worship is possible for all of us. It's possible to believe in Jesus as Lord and the Messiah and the Savior of all. It's a wonderful thing to be able to give worship born of conviction and out of love, where you can trust in the Lord with all your heart so that you worship him in spirit and in truth. Not just as a box to be checked.

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I went to church. Check. He is inviting us to join him. As Diane so beautifully put it last week, he's inviting us to the celebration. Come Easter, he's inviting all of us to join him.

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We're all on this journey of faith together here at Zion, and we're all in different places, so no judgment here. But there is one thing in common that we all must deal with if we want to answer this invitation to new life and to have the kind of relationship and worship for the Lord like Mary did. And that one thing is confronting and dealing with our sin. Sin being anything that goes against God's will and his moral law. Sin is what separates us from that amazing grace.

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It separates us from being in his presence, and it separates us from true heartfelt worship. Have you ever come to church after just having an argument in the car? It's kind of difficult to get in the groove, isn't it? Repentance is the answer to our problem, our sin problem. And, you know, repentance has gotten a really bad rap over the years, maybe

from those crazy guys that stand on the street corner, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand, like, or whatever.

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I don't know, maybe, you know, different flavors of churches using repentance. But to me, it's a beautiful thing. It's part of the invitational answer to how we can embrace Christ. Repentance comes from the Greek word in the New Testament, which is metanoia. It is derived from two parts, meta meaning after or change, and noia related to the mind or thinking.

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Probably we're paranoia comes from I don't know. Thus, metanoia signifies a profound change of mind or heart. In our case, a shift in one's inner perspective that leads to turning away from sin and towards God. Imagine yourself on this continuum. Here's your sin and here's God.

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Repentance is turning away from your sin. And you might still be pointing towards your sin, and you might just be deciding to turn away. Whether you're here, here, or here in your spiritual walk with Jesus, you are growing in Christ. When you turn, he starts to do a new thing, and your spiritual growth is begun. And it doesn't matter where on this continuum you are today, as long as you turn from that and turn towards God, you're growing spiritually.

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Peter and John were on the way to the temple one day, and there was this guy begging, and they answered him. Do you remember what they said? Peter said, silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give unto thee? Get up and walk. And what did the guy do?

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He got up and walked. And all the people were like, oh, my goodness. And they started to follow Peter, John. And when Peter understood that he had this whole crowd, he asked them, what? Why are you so amazed at what just happened with this.

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With this fellow here? He went on to preach to them and remind them. Yeah, and, oh, by the way, you're the guys that killed the Lord, crucified him. But that's okay. He's a God of grace.

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He can do the impossible. With man, everything is impossible, or a lot of things are. But with God, nothing is impossible. So then he says in Acts 3:19 to them, he says, repent, turn towards the Lord, away from your sin then, and turn to God. Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

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And what? That times of refreshing may come? Yes. So that your sins in Isaiah might, under the blood be turned white as snow. So that times of refreshing can come from the presence of the Lord.

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It's our sin that inhibits that. When we turn from God, turn from our sin and towards God, that time of refreshing and connection is made. Like Mary's belief in Jesus moved from an internal thing or belief to an outward act. So will our expression and recognition of him as Lord as we repent and truly get to know him as we prepare for the celebration of his death and resurrection and victory over what? Oh, sin and death.

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Yeah, that. Let's consider where we are right now, where we want to be, and see if we can't bridge that gap from intention to action with repentance. I want to give just a moment of reflection, a time. We're going to be celebrating communion, and when we do, it's an amazing time to connect with that grace. The very act of consuming Jesus is remembering that his body was broken and his blood was shed for the remission of our sins.

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Let's pray.

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Lord, we love you. We thank you for this moment where we can understand where we are on the continuum.

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As we make a decision to turn from our sin, we lift it up to you and we say, God, would you take this away? Would you wash me white as snow? Would there be times of refreshing that might come in your presence as sin no longer blocks or separates me from you, and allow the Lord to respond to you by saying, child, I love you. And truly, I died so that those sins could be forgiven already. Thank you for asking.

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Sermon April 6 Pastor Brian Griswold

Thank you for inviting me into your life. Thank you for removing this obstacle so that we can truly have a relationship together that is born of deep conviction, trust and deep love. Father, we thank you for creating a clean heart within us. In Jesus name, Amen.