

Lent 5 Prayers, Sunday April 3, 2022

Congregational Concerns

Fraser (in Poland helping refugees escape Ukraine) the people of Ukraine, Sharon Axford, Cherie Doyon, Larry Seabrook, Evelyn Crafts' granddaughter Brittany, Vi, Jenny & family, Randy Greer, Cathy Tredenick, Karl Crocker, Linda Hepburn, Lori Ann, Shirley Griffin, Liz & Wayne Dieleman & family

Pastoral Prayer

Good and gracious God we're here to give thanks for the gift of NOW; for this day which you have made. We've come here to praise you for your love writ large in the beauties of the natural world, and enfleshed in the precious people we love and even in the ones we find difficult to like.

As the Covid 19 cloud begins to disperse, your churches resume gathering together. Thank you for bringing us through the valley. It is a blessing to be together in the sanctuary, singing, praying, and sharing Communion at the Lord's Table. We rejoice in welcoming into fellowship our friends, Brenda Silcox, Jean Palmer and Murray Silcox.

Believing that your Spirit nudged them here, we are excited and look forward to getting to know them and serve you alongside them. May the Spirit that raised Jesus to life, enliven us all as we begin this new phase in our partnership in the gospel.

Mother Hen God, we recall the people who have requested prayers. May your peace rest upon them, their families, friends and caregivers. May they discover well-springs of solace, soft places of grace, and safe harbors of hope along this difficult journey in their lives.

Creator of this majestic planet, we pray for our world. We pray for those whose lives are upended, disrupted and devastated by the effects of climate change. We pray for Ukrainians who are suffering so deeply due to a senseless, violent, wasteful and evil war. Saving God, lead displaced people to new homes. Healing God, bring help and healing to injured ones. Crying God, send angels dressed in human garb to wrap their arms around grieving mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children and elders.

God of justice, may the consequences of cruelty be felt by the perpetrators, so that repentance would rise up and smash the ice in cold hearts. We pray for the end of violence as the go to problem solver. We ask this not just in Ukraine's situation but in every situation where violence thrives, whether it lurks in the darkness in the household of an abuser, or prances in the bright spot light of a Hollywood stage. Forgive us, O God whenever we surrender to the "might makes right" philosophy.

God of the church of Jesus, this week we found reason for rejoicing. We are relieved and grateful that Pope Francis did right by the indigenous peoples of Canada and the world. We celebrate with indigenous neighbors this long, long overdue apology. Thank you, Creator for the courage, vulnerability and long-suffering patience of residential school survivors and others who have spent their life-times working, praying, protesting and suffering so they might hear these words: "I am very sorry."

Mother/Father God, we pray for ourselves. Hear us as in the silence we offer our personal prayers.

Silent prayer

God, we pray for our church as we move through a time of transition and change. Hear us as in silence we offer our prayers for our leaders, and the future path of your church.

Silent prayer

Jesus, you are the host at this table. As we share the bread of life and drink the wine of heaven, may each heart rejoice that we are yours, and you are with us. Always. Amen

Gospel Luke 12: 1-8; 13: 1-6

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary 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. ⁴But 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.) ⁷Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

13Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

Sermon LAST RITES

Today the Lenten gospel draws us within one week of Jesus betrayal, and death. Six days prior to the Passover, John says, Jesus eats supper, one of his very last suppers, with the closest friends that he has in this world. Jesus and his disciples, including Judas, who is soon to betray him, gather in Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem to dine with Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha.

It is Luke's gospel that first introduces us to this trinity of siblings— In Luke chapter 10, right after Jesus relates a parable to a curious lawyer about a neighborly Samaritan, Jesus and his disciples walked to the town of Bethany to the home of three siblings, Martha, Mary and Lazarus. You'll remember the story, that while Martha slaved in the kitchen trying to get a meal on for Jesus and his crew her younger sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet, hanging on to his every word. When Martha objected to Mary's neglect of her kitchen duties, Jesus admonished his hostess, saying that Mary had chosen *the better task*. Martha must have graciously conceded to his rebuke, but I wonder if Jesus noticed that his meal seemed to be a bit *spicier* than usual? The familiarity between Jesus

and this family makes it pretty clear that this family's home in Bethany was Jesus' home away from home. Their home provided needed sanctuary from the crowds and a rest stop on his road trips to Jerusalem. John's gospel indicates that Jesus' affection for the three siblings, perhaps particularly for Mary, was strong. So when one day he received word from the sisters that Lazarus was sick Jesus went to him. However, by the time Jesus got to Bethany his friend has been deceased and in his tomb for four days. When Jesus was confronted by a grief-stricken, angry Martha and asked why he didn't get there in time to save her brother, Jesus responded to her in the abstract. *"I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe me?"* Martha, likely taken aback by his reply conceded that she believed that he was the Messiah. But then Mary arrived and she also asked Jesus about his late arrival. Her pleading eyes and tear-stained face touched Jesus deeply.

His next actions came straight from the heart. Jesus walked with Mary out to Lazarus' grave and standing beside her began to openly weep. Then after he wept, he prayed. And then after he prayed, he shouted: "Lazarus, come forth!" And miraculously, astoundingly, incredibly...Lazarus staggered forth from his tomb, tripping on the cloths that had been wrapped round his dead body.

According to John's gospel, it is this miracle, which occurs on the outskirts of Jerusalem while the crowds of pilgrims are pouring into the city for Passover that tips the balance for Jesus' enemies...and for Judas. Because of Lazarus, the next course of action was quickly decided. Jesus must be eliminated. And if necessary, Lazarus would die, too. With these dire undercurrents as the context for the scripture story today, let's step into the shadowed corner of a humble but well-appointed dining room. It is six days before Jesus' last supper. We observe Jesus and his friends as they take their places around a feast of home-cooked, aromatic delights, created by a very grateful Martha. Lazarus is present. As the host he is reclining at the head of the table. Still in a state of shock from his return to life, his face is pale and his mood is quieter than usual. Maybe he was aware that his presence added a surreal atmosphere to the meal. Imagine how he must have wanted to fade into the woodwork so to speak, so that everyone's attention would be focused where it ought to be: on his rescuer, Jesus.

The meal begins and Martha brings out each course, and removes any empty bowls. The conversation picks up once empty stomachs are satisfied and the wine begins to flow. In the midst of this going on, Mary enters the room. In both hands she carries a beautiful jar, filled with nard. Nard was a very expensive oil which enjoyed many uses. It is still used as an essential oil.

Mary kneels at Jesus' feet, reaches up with a free hand to loosen her hair from its pins and then pours the contents of the jar unto his feet. She then dries each foot with the long tendrils of her beautiful, raven black hair. Startled by the strong aroma and whirling around to find the origin,

Judas erupts with indignation. He accuses Mary who was his host, of wasting money that could have been given to help the poor. Jesus, his heart no doubt touched and moved by this woman

for whom his heart has always had a soft spot quickly shuts Judas down with a rebuke.

"Leave her alone. She bought this so she may keep it for my burial." Then Jesus said, "You'll always have opportunities to help the poor, but you will not always have me."

Poor Martha, who had been watching from the doorway of the kitchen, turns away and sits down beside the hearth. Holding her head in her hands she struggles not to weep. Silently

she curses her little sister for having made a scene, and wonders what to make of Jesus' somber prediction of his burial.

Lazarus, his numbed mind, startled awake by Judas' anger, looks up from his plate and notices that not one person is looking warily at him. All eyes are turned to watching Jesus and Mary.

As Mary dries the oil with her hair, her tears spill to mingle with the nard; *A bittersweet offering of love*. She senses the touch of Jesus' hand upon her bowed head. He understands her and he knows that she understands him. They both realize that this moment, this meal, this time together is a precious respite before all hell breaks loose--- and heaven responds. The clouds of grief are piling up against the door but Jesus love for her, for his friends along with the miracle of her brother's rebirth are hopeful signs that whatever lies ahead.... and surely it will prove very, very hard.... it too will pass away.

But the love, the love will endure all.

The God who sent Jesus to seek and save, bless and teach, heal and uplift, serve and sacrifice and give life up for the sake of love.... his God will see them through.

Six days after this meal, Jesus will share his *very last meal* with his disciples before he faces an old rugged cross. We're not told if Mary, Martha and Lazarus were present at that meal But we know that Judas was there— until he left to betray.

We know Peter was there before he chose to deny Jesus three times—

We know the other men disciples were there, until they ran away into the darkness--- in fear for their own lives.

And we know that at that last meal, Jesus, perhaps taking his cue from his friend Mary, fetched a bowl of water and a towel, and returned to the table. Then he humbly knelt down on the floor. One by one he washed his disciples' feet with water -- and tears.

This gracious act of self-less love may have been a way of honoring the devotion of Mary.

We don't know for sure. But it was used by Jesus to provide another important and lasting lesson for his followers, all his followers, to follow. They were to move forward, beyond betrayals, beyond denials, beyond their frightened retreats, beyond the horrors of the cross. Jesus' last rites for his disciples indicated that his impending death would not signal just ending but also new beginning both for Jesus and for his church.

So, as we gather at his table to remember *those two last suppers* that Jesus shared with those he loved, and who also loved him dearly---may we not take each other for granted.

Let us see each other and treat each other as the kindred of Christ. Then let us go forth, back to our homes, schools and places of work and volunteer service and devote ourselves to good works and good words, in Jesus' name.

May our loving contributions leave a sweet and potent fragrance of grace, as the good news of God's enduring love for our broken and beautiful world flows from us.

Amen