



Fifth Sunday in Lent  
April 3, 2022

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

My wife and I lost a child for a time yesterday. Our 8-year-old told us she was going to take the dog for a walk. Baxter, our golden retriever, is notorious for not walking with our younger two children. He will cross the first street – go two houses and then sit down or simply turn around and start dragging our daughters back towards home. I watched him start to drag our youngest back towards home and so I pulled on my jacket and went outside. And as soon as Baxter saw me, he turned around and started walking. After four more houses, I went back home. My wife told her not to cross the street at the end of our street. And our 8-year-old simply turned right at the corner and kept on walking. Technically – she did not cross the street. But after twenty minutes, my wife asked if I could see our youngest from the upstairs window and when I could not lay eyes on her, I started to wonder where she had gone. I went downstairs, jumped in the car and drove down the street. No Hadley. I drove to the park. No Hadley. I drove the subdivision. No Hadley. So I went home. Grabbed my other daughter, my phone, and told my wife to get in the other car. There is that moment in every parent’s life where the realization of the inability to place eyes on your child – causes your heart to sink, your heartrate to increase, and your adrenaline to rise and you begin to determine the exact moment when you will start to panic. It would be so much easier if we could simply insert a tracker into a child’s arm at birth and then have it removed when they are 18 or 22. Not to know everything they do and know every everywhere they go, but to not lose them along the way. It turns out, my daughter decided to go to grandpa’s house. The fact that she chose to walk that far and the fact that Baxter kept walking that far are both surprising to me. But it was the second panic phone call I made while searching the park that saved the day. When I called grandpa to tell him to get in his truck to go look for Hadley. “Dad, have you seen Hadley and Baxter?” And my father’s answer, “yes – they just left.” I love that my daughter felt so comfortable walking all the way to grandpa’s house, and so welcome in his home. I just wish she had given us any notice at all that is where she was thinking about going.

Jesus finds the same kind of welcome in the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. We know this home. We have heard the story of Mary and Martha, where Jesus has visited the home and Mary sat at his feet listening while Martha worked to cook and complained that Mary would not help. We know this home where Jesus knew safety and hospitality. We know this home – it is the place Jesus traveled to when news came that his friend Lazarus was sick. And after Lazarus died, Jesus met Martha and then Mary on the road towards this home to be confronted and accused of being too slow to help Lazarus. And then outside this home, we heard Martha’s confession of Jesus, “yes Lord, I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, come into the world.” And now, we find Jesus sitting at the table with Lazarus – risen from the dead. Martha, of course, is serving. Yet the attention is, again, on the one who is at the feet of Jesus – offering their worship. John tells us:<sup>3</sup> Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them<sup>a</sup> with her hair. Scripture tells us, “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

It is Mary’s act of worship and sacrifice that fills the home with love. Without regard for scorn or judgment, Mary offers her whole self in an act of worship at the feet of Jesus. Days from now, Jesus will enter Jerusalem and days later he will be dead. Whether Mary has any idea of the days to come or not, she sacrifices all that she has – her reputation, her standing, her authority, her dignity to wash the feet of her Savior. Yet it is the next moment that calls the rest of the room to account. The year’s wages of perfume was extravagance beyond belief. The drying of the feet of Jesus with Mary’s hair was extravagance beyond measure. The closest ideal for us may be found in the extravagant love of a father waiting for his prodigal son to return – and the extravagance measured only in the love of God sacrificing the Son for all the world.

Author Maya Angelou writes, “Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.” In essence, what Mary does to worship at the feet of Jesus. Although the distance from standing to kneeling was only a couple of steps for Mary to travel – the distance could just as easily have been measured in the expanse of the Grand Canyon. And yet Mary moves – while others struggle to understand what Jesus means to the world – Mary knows what Jesus means to her. And without questioning the journey, Mary kneels full of



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hope before her Savior. Mary knows that Jesus means life for her brother who is returned to this life. Mary knows that Jesus means promise in the stories of forgiveness he shares. Mary knows that Jesus means love for who she is regardless of mistake, regret, or failing. Jesus is the one who calls Mary to life. And Mary kneels before Jesus to worship the God who calls her by name.

I stood in the Emergency Room yesterday morning to pray with the Birner family at the death of Joan's daughter Linda. The shock was overwhelming – devastating – shattering. When there are no words to speak into the gaping chasm of the power of death, only actions offer solace. And so walking into the Emergency Room, I wrapped my arms around Joan and held her as she wept. It was an act of worship. On holy ground, I could not offer words that would bring peace or comfort, I could only offer myself in some humble, but poor representation of the One who was already present in the room. The God who gives life. The God who promises forgiveness. The God who comes to each of us where we are. The God who loves us for who we are. The God who calls us from the power of death; calls us from the grip of the grave and welcomes us through the gates of the kingdom of heaven – into eternal life.

If grief is the price we pay for love, we know the price all too well. In the end, the price we pay is more than we can imagine and yet never seems to be enough to cover the cost. Mary knew the cost of her love for her brother. The grief had been more than Mary could fathom. When Jesus called Mary's brother out of the grave, releasing him from the power of death, Mary could hardly believe what she heard Jesus say, let alone what she saw when Lazarus stepped into the light. Mary had held her dead brother's hand. She had wrapped his body in cloth and anointed his body for burial. She had stood at the grave while the stone was rolled to seal the grave. Days later, she watched Lazarus walk out of that same grave. This is the reason Mary worships Jesus. Her brother who was dead was called into life.

This is why I worship Jesus. The ones I love who were dead have been called into eternal life by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is why I worship. Because the welcome Jesus finds in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is the same welcome we will each find in the Kingdom of God. So I will pay the price of grief for the love I give and receive in this life. And one day, my Savior will cover the cost for me and I will know that I am home among those I love. Thanks be to God. Amen.