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John 12:1-8
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Have you ever asked the right question for the wrong reason?

- It seems to me that Judas does that in our reading today from John

- Judas asks

- “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii

- and the money given to the poor?”

- Mary has just used a pound of pure nard

- to anoint Jesus’ feet

- in today’s world that would be like taking a \$20,000 bottle of perfume

- and pouring it over someone’s feet

- It is an act of extravagance

- that is startling and unexpected.

- Now, - I’m not sure what I would have done

- if I’d seen something like that happen - -

- My guess is I would have been shocked and confused

- and I might have said something like

- “What are you doing?”

- or

- “Do you know what you just did?”

- because really, when three months salary is being used on someone’s feet,

- it's hard to imagine not raising a question about the decision, - -
- so I give Judas credit for essentially asking the right question
 - namely - -
 - 'How do we as people of God
 - make the best use of our resources
 - to accomplish the ministry
 - that God has called us to do?'
 - Now the text says Judas asked his question, - -
 - because he wanted to be able to steal from the money, - -
 - so his motivations weren't pure in asking his question,
 - but the question he raises is one that we as Christians face on a daily basis
 - because 'How **do** we faithfully
 - make the best use of our resources
 - to accomplish the ministry
 - that God has called us to do?'
 - in Mary's case,
 - she appears to have been called to a ministry
 - of preparation
 - preparing Jesus and the disciples
 - for the journey to Jerusalem
 - and Jesus' impending death.
 - And while it is true that,

- Mary's decision to anoint Jesus' feet with this nard
 - raises the possibility that she is wasting a valuable resource
- Jesus quickly helps Judas,
 - helps us to see
 - that what she is doing
 - was not wasting a resource,
- but rather investing her resources
 - to accomplish the mission God is calling her to do. - - -
 - Anointing Jesus' feet
 - was an act of love
 - that reflected the abundant love God shows God's people
 - and was a sign
 - that helps prepare Jesus and his followers
 - for the death that awaits him in Jerusalem.
- The ministry with the poor that Judas speaks of is an important, necessary ministry, - -
 - but it wasn't Mary's ministry, - - -
 - and as Jesus points out,
 - the amount of money that the nard represents, -
 - even as large an amount of money as that was, - -
 - wouldn't solve the problem of poverty
 - "You always have the poor with you,
But you do not always have me."

- In other words,
 - Jesus' ministry to love, bless, and save the world is really the only solution
 - to the sin and inequity that causes the problem of poverty
 - and while we absolutely need to push back against the sin and inequity
 - of this world,
 - while we absolutely need to address the real world impacts of
 - the sin and inequity in our world,
 - the assistance that the sale of the nard would provide,
 - wouldn't solve the long-term problem.
- The investment Mary makes in Jesus, - -
 - the example of abundant love she pours over Jesus
 - as he begins his journey to the cross and the empty tomb
 - is not a foolish waste of resources, - -
 - but choice
 - that allows Mary to accomplish her ministry - -
 - a ministry which helps set the stage for the saving act
 - that Jesus is undertaking.
- Now for you and for me
 - the question of how we use our resources to accomplish the ministry
 - God has called us to do
 - may not require us to spend a significant portion of our earnings
 - on foot ointment,

- but the question of how we act as good stewards
 - of the gifts God has given us, - -
- the question of how we manage the good news
 - that God has invested a great deal in each and every one of us, - -
- the question of how we make the best use of the resources God has given us
 - to accomplish the ministry
 - that God has called us to do
- well
 - that is a question that we are called to answer
 - in our lives.
- On a personal level
 - that means investing
 - the gifts God has given us in ways
 - which match the ministry God has called us to do
- so for example
 - if God has called you to the ministry of nurturing the lives of young people,
 - then the way you invest your money,
 - your time and your talents
 - says something to those young people
 - about what you believe and what is important to you.
- So if you are spending time with youth people, especially little ones,
 - and you invested more time watching television shows or playing video games,

- than you invest in your relationship with them, -
- then they will learn pretty quickly that
- entertainment is more important than they are.
- If they see you invest some of your financial gifts resources
- and your time
- in helping someone in who is in need,
- then they will understand more clearly
- that God invites us to share generously
- and to care about the whole community.
- Your ministry may be music
- Your ministry may be caring for a parent in need
- Your ministry may be rebuilding homes
- or amplifying the voices of the outcast, trampled upon, and disregarded, -
- but whatever your ministry is, -
- whatever God calls you to do in this world, - -
- the good news is
- that God has entrusted you with valuable gifts
- God has given you a pound of Nard to use for ministry
- and God given you the freedom
- to invests those gifts to make ministry happen.
- Judas' question and
- Mary's abundant generosity,

- reminds us, it seems to me,
 - that how you invest those gifts
 - is an important witness to what you believe
 - and who you are.
- Let’s face it,
- Our world gets awfully wound up
 - in money and possessions - -
 - In what we have and what we don’t have.
- There are so many people in this world
 - running and running and running
 - trying to get more and more
 - just so they can post the pictures
 - and say
 - “Look at what I have” - -
- that it’s easy to get caught up the the race -
 - and begin to believe that the possessions and the pictures,
 - are what really matters,
- but the good news Mary teaches us
 - by this act of extravagant generosity
 - is that it’s not what you have that counts,
 - but rather
 - what you do the with the gifts God has given you

- that can make a lasting impression in this world.
- I mean
 - if Mary had sold the perfume
 - and helped a few hundred people,
 - the impact would have been impressive at the moment,
 - and people would have been helped,
 - but chances are,
 - the story would probably have never been told, - -
 - by investing
 - this valuable gift, however,
 - in this abundant expression of love for Jesus
 - by investing this valuable gift
 - to fulfill the ministry of preparation she was called to do,
 - Mary invites the followers of Jesus across the centuries
 - to see the world through a paradigm of generosity,
 - encouraging you and me and all of God's people,
 - to seek out ways to invest the gifts God has given them
 - to accomplish the unique ministry
 - God had called each of us you to do.