

Cautious & Careful

On Sunday we looked at another dramatic encounter with Jesus, this time involving Mary (the sister of Lazarus) and Judas Iscariot.

1. Warm-up Question: Some of us are risk adverse; some of us are not. What's one of the craziest, riskiest things you've ever done?
2. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were sisters and brother. They lived together, not just as siblings, but as best friends. They were also good friends with Jesus. When Jesus was in the area of Bethany, he stayed with them. Lazarus once became deathly ill when Jesus was far away. By the time Jesus got there, Lazarus was dead. When Jesus did arrive, he insisted that Lazarus tomb be opened, and Jesus called him forth out of the tomb, resurrected and alive. You can imagine how overjoyed Mary and Martha must have been. Several months later, Jesus was back in Bethany for another visit. That where our story picks up. Read John 12:1-8, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In the middle of the dinner party described in our Gospel passage, Mary walked into the dining room with a bottle of extraordinarily expensive perfume made of pure spikenard. The text says it was worth 300 denarii, which equates to \$35,000 in our modern economy! When the dinner guests saw this bottle of rare perfume, what do you suppose they thought and felt? Think of a time someone showed you a rare and expensive item. What was it and how did it make you feel?
 - b. As Mary approached Jesus with the bottle of nard, the dinner guests probably assumed she was going to give it to Jesus as a donation to his ministry. Instead she broke the bottle open and dumped the entire contents on his feet and out onto the floor. If you had been there, how do you think you would have reacted?
 - c. Mary's extravagant gesture was apparently motivated by a deep sense of gratitude toward Jesus for giving her beloved brother back to her. In your own life, who's someone you feel enormous gratitude toward – and why? How have you expressed your gratitude?
3. It would be an understatement to say that what Mary did was lavish, crazy, and over-the-top. She dumped \$35,000 of perfume on Jesus' feet! Judas criticized her for being reckless and wasteful. He noted that if she had instead donated the perfume to Jesus' ministry, they could have fed hundreds of hungry people.
 - a. Suppose Mary had sought your advice, asking if you thought she should: (a) donate the perfume to allow Jesus to feed the hungry; or (b) pour out the perfume on Jesus' feet. Which option would you have recommended and why?
 - b. In response to Judas' criticism of Mary, Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." John 12:7-8. What do you think Jesus

meant? Was he minimizing the desperate needs of the poor? If not, what was his point? Say what you think he meant in your own words.

4. Jeff summarized Jesus' statement in John 12:8 as follows: "There will always be a reason not to do bold, extravagant things. There will always be another problem in life to solve that could keep us from celebrating the moment. But Mary wasn't going to let that happen. She sensed Jesus would soon be gone. She wasn't going to miss her moment to express gratitude. She pulled out all the stops. She invested everything in the moment." Jeff suggested that Mary and Judas illustrate two very different ways of living, as summarized in the chart on p. 3. Take a look at the chart, then address the following two questions: Which of these two paradigms does your personality most naturally gravitate toward? Which do you believe is better in the eyes of God?

5. Jeff suggested there is a role for both these perspectives in our life, depending on the time and circumstances. As Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." There is no simple formula that can tell us when to be bold and when to be cautious. Instead, it's a Spirit thing.
 - a. Isaiah 30:21 says, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left." What do you think that verse means?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life you sensed God's Spirit calling you to be cautious. What happened?
 - c. Tell us about a time in your life you sensed God's Spirit calling you to be bold. What happened?
 - d. A portion of Bette Midler's song "The Rose" goes as follows:

It's the heart, afraid of breaking that never learns to dance.
It's the dream, afraid of waking that never takes the chance.
It's the one who won't be taken who cannot seem to give.
And the soul, afraid of dying that never learns to live.

Why do you think this song moves us so deeply?
 - e. What Mary did in our Gospel story – breaking open the bottle of pure nard and pouring it out onto Jesus' feet – was extravagant, bold, and audacious. Sometimes God also calls us to do crazy, audacious things. Jeff gave three examples: (1) when Dr. Kane removed his own appendix to prove the feasibility of using local anesthesia; (2) when comedian Patton Oswalt raised money to cover the medical expenses of his political enemy Michael Beatty; and (3) when Karen Knapp demanded her son be given access to the NICU to sing to his dying sister who then revived. Where in your life right now is God calling you to throw

caution to the wind and do something crazy for the love of God, the love of others, and the love of life?

John 12:1-8

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."



Be bold!