

Not a Waste
John 12:1-8
Colebrook Congregational Church
March 13, 2016 / 5th Sunday of Lent

Many of the iconic films of Japanese cinema have a film from the west that was influenced by it and helps to describe that film to us. The Seven Samurai? We have the Magnificent Seven. Yojimbo? We have A Fistful of Dollars. The Hidden Fortress? We have Star Wars. However, the film I want to mention does not have a western equivalent, and the title of the film has become an unofficial term in journalism and other fields. It's called Rashomon, and it is about four people sitting under an arch in a storm, and they each tell a story of an incident they had just witnessed. They slowly all realized that they had all seen the same thing, but their stories were quite different from each other! Today, journalists sometimes call a situation where many eyewitness accounts do not match, as a rashomon. When I look at the four gospels, I am reminded of Rashomon.

Today's selection comes from the Gospel of John. John's Gospel was the last to be written, and it is a very different depiction of Jesus. In Matthew, He is scholarly like a rabbi, in Mark, it is theatrical, in Luke, He is compassionate like a doctor, but in John, it is the theological view of the Gospels, and Jesus can seem aloof. It's audience is primarily a Greek one, and they had been rejected at the synagogue, so there is a undertone of that pain throughout. It also describes Jesus having a much longer ministry, three years, the longest of all the gospels, compared to Mark's description of only three months.

The story of the Anointment at Bethany is told in all four Gospels. The accounts in Matthew & Mark are very similar, and they are pretty close to John. But, there are some differences. In Mark, Jesus' head is anointed, they went to Simon the Leper's house, and the woman and complainer were not identified. In Luke's they went to a Pharisee's house, the woman was identified as a sinner without a name given, she bathes Jesus' feet with tears, then dries them with her hair, and then anoints with oil, the Pharisee is the complainer, and Jesus' response was a parable on forgiveness and hospitality. In John, Jesus' feet are anointed, they are in the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, all the players are identified and spoken about, though some are not in today's selection, they were in the prior chapter.

The chapter starts with a date. On the Jewish calendar, it is Nisan 8, 9, or 10, based on our dating of Good Friday on Nisan 14 or 15.

They are in the home of Lazarus, freshly resurrected by Jesus, so they are throwing a dinner in Jesus' honor. Lazarus is hosting at the table, and as usual, Martha is in charge of the service. Now, in that culture at that time, it was considered shameful to have one's hair loose, as was placing ointment on someone's feet rather than their head; And then wiping it with one's hair was unthinkable. Because of this, we can see that John and his audience were not all that familiar with first century Jewish daily life.

The complaint that this ointment could have been sold off for 300 denarii and then used to help a multitude of people was laid at the feet of Judas, as was a nefarious reason given for his motivation, marking his moral deterioration and setting up his betrayal. John's Gospel does not record the deal between Judas and the High Priest that the other Gospels do.

As the story ends, there is the implication that there is oil left over to use for Jesus' funeral rites. And Jesus' response could also be interpreted in light of the previous story, where Jesus raised up Lazarus, their brother, and this is a gift of gratitude from Mary, a very lavish gift. Essentially, Jesus is saying that there is no waste in an act of love!

Both Judas and Mary have valid points. Selling the ointment and using the denarii to help many people is completely in line with Jesus' teachings. Which would we usually rather do? If we have only a certain amount, would we want to help one person or help 100? I think most of us would choose to help the hundred. Get the most done or do the most help for your efforts, right?

On the other hand, Mary's action is just as valid! In John's Gospel, Jesus's death is spoken of a lot more bluntly. Knowing that Jesus is not going to around for much longer, it makes sense to spend a bit more for a gift for Him. That reason is because of timing. Then consider that Jesus had just resurrected her brother Lazarus! It makes complete sense that Mary wanted

to give a lavish gift as a thank you. What would any of us do for someone who saved the life of a loved one? Both taken together can be like shopping for a gift for a loved one, finding the perfect gift, and it's on sale. Timing and gratitude.

A few weeks ago, a friend's father passed away. As is customary when that happens, people gave her food. One person sent her a huge ham. She said it was the size of toddler when it arrived. Problem was, she's a vegetarian. Her family took care of some of it, but couldn't handle the rest of it. She summoned me to her house to look through her father's books, and as I sat in his office, she poked her head in and asked if my car was unlocked. It was. Then she hustled by with a massive box and went out the door. She came back in and as she passed the office called out, "There's ham in your car!"

So, now I have ham in my car. And it was massive. When I got home, I brought it into the kitchen and left it on the counter and walked away. I had to think about how I was going to handle this. I invited friends over for ham, and then I threatened that anyone within an hour of me was fair game of me showing up at their door with an unexpected ham sandwich. Well, I ended up getting a loaf of wonder bread and made simple ham sandwiches, and delivered them to friends, and we had laughs.

There was one person, though, who has always been there for me, and been a best friend to me, so I wanted to do something special for her, in gratitude. I was going to be attending a workshop in Glastonbury after church, and I knew that she was going to be working at Hartford Hospital at the time that I would be returning home. Well, I went out and got special bread, no wonder bread for this sandwich! I went to a deli and got sliced Cabot cheddar cheese. I came home and carefully choose the best slices of ham, added onions, the cheese, a bit of garlic powder, and then put it in the george forman to make it like a panini grilled cheese without the greasiness. This sandwich was several steps up from the other sandwiches! And then I added a bag of chips and a juice bottle. Anything worth doing is worth overdoing, right? Judas' complaint rings true in this case as well. The amount I spent on the sandwich and the rest of the meal could have been used to buy stuff for the Food Pantry that would have fed a lot more people! But on the other

hand, the timing worked out that I was going to be near her, the ham was not going to last much longer, and it was gift of gratitude & love, like Mary's gift to Jesus.

There is no waste in giving a gift of love. Sure, it is good to help as many others as possible, but sometimes, you just have to be lavish. Be it because of a timely situation or because of gratitude. Those times should never be forgotten, because you may not get a chance later on, or someone could really use more something, be it a thank you or attention, at that moment. To quote a Vulcan, the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one. And that is usually true. But Jesus wants us to remember that sometimes, it is the other way around. We must remember that, there is no waste in giving a gift of love.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

Most generous God, with thankful hearts we rejoice in the example that Mary has set for us. We are reminded that our gifts should also be used in a timely fashion, and to express our gratitude. We give You our thanks for the physical gifts that sustain us and for the added blessings which make life more joyful and full. We rejoice that You too freely anoint us all with agape. We are thankful for those who have been bountiful towards us, giving of their time, their skills and their love. As a token of our gladness, may we also bless others, being generous with all that You have bestowed upon us, Amen.

Intercessory Prayer

[PAUSE]

Benevolent God, as Jesus in the days before His passion, offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears, we pray for those who suffer, those who are in need, and those who seek reconciliation.

We give you thanks for all the blessings and gifts you have given us, for those you have led into our lives and for moving us into the lives of others. And we thank you for using us as instruments of your divine love for us all.

We pray for the forgiveness of sins known and unknown, for falling short of how we should be towards ourselves, towards our fellow humans, and to all of Your Creation. May we be reassured of Your forgiveness, so we may try to do better and make amends as we move forward.

We pray for everyone who needs Your help. For those who are unwell or wounded in mind, body, or spirit. We pray to be of assistance if we can, and for all those who have dedicated their lives to helping others. We pray to bring comfort to the lonely, shelter to the exposed and vulnerable, and nourishment to the hungry. May you fortify us to better serve you through our service to our neighbors.

We pray for ourselves. We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, to live up to the standard Jesus set for us. We pray that we recognize your messengers and those You send to help us and redirect us for who they are, and that we show the wisdom to heed them. And we pray for the strength to resist the temptations in our daily lives and continue the Lenten sacrifices that we offer up to You.

We especially pray for:

God of compassion, You know our faults and yet you promised to forgive. Keep us in Your presence and give us your wisdom. Open our hearts to gladness, call dry bones to dance, and restore to us the joy of your salvation. Amen.

Psalm 126

126:1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

126:2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

126:3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

126:4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

126:5 May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

126:6 Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

John 12:1-8

12:1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

12:2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

12:3 Mary 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.

12:4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,

12:5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"

12:6 (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.)

12:7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.

12:8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."