

**Sunday April 6, 2025**  
**Fifth Sunday of Lent**

**Meditation: “Prodigal Love”**

Mary, not Jesus’ mother, not Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, you know, sister of Martha and Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. That Mary.

Mary, like most other Israelites, oversaw a family budget, budget, that’s a joke, a family budget that was just large enough to ensure that they had sufficient to prevent starvation. There was no extra money left at the end of each day. One denarius in, one denarius out. Day in, day out; week in, week out; month in, month out; year in, year out. Yet somehow, over many years, Mary managed to save up an entire year’s wages, and with it, she bought an alabaster flask of spikenard. Spikenard is pressed from the rhizomes of the plant, which grows in the Himalayas at an elevation of between 10 and 16,000 feet. With a limited growing range, a labour intensive process to dig up the rhizomes and extract the oil, and then transporting it from the Himalayas to Israel meant that the cost was exorbitant.

And now she was about to do something that most people would consider prodigal, something recklessly extravagant. She was about to break open the flask and dump the entire contents on Jesus’ feet, and wipe the day’s grime away with her hair, which is kind of ironic because spikenard means ‘lock of hair’ in Hindi. In that moment, the monetary value of the flask and its contents were irrelevant to Mary. What mattered far more than the oil was her relationship with Jesus. She was pouring out an extravagance on Jesus as he had poured out for them.

Spending time together, being attentive to the other and to the relationship: that’s love. And she had certainly spent much time being attentive to Jesus over the years. He had been a great friend and teacher, but like any relationship this was a two way street. Jesus had needed the friendship and support of Mary, her sister Martha, and her brother Lazarus, just as they had needed Jesus when Lazarus died. Mary was only too happy to tell others about all that Jesus had taught her and especially what Jesus had done for them when he had brought Lazarus back from the dead.

Judas thought it was appalling. Such reckless extravagance. That one flask of nard could have fetched a handsome sum for their common purse. But she was unconcerned with the material value of the substance. What she was concerned with was the relationship she had with the man who was a friend, and who brought her brother back to life. A flask of oil that took a lifetime of scrimping to save up for used in one application: that was love in action. Giving all you have: your time, your skill, your material resources in the service of others, because you want to: that's love, some would say it's prodigal love.

Prodigal love is not exclusive. It does not pick and choose who deserves it and who doesn't, for in God's eyes, none of us *deserve* it AND it is poured out for all. Prodigal love does not insist on its own way, but accepts the choices that all people freely make. Prodigal love does not threaten, or use force or violence. Prodigal love does not elevate nationhood above the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven (depending on which gospel you are reading), but places God's eternal realm of love, compassion, grace, forgiveness, distributive justice, fairness, equity, peace and joy above ideological constructs that separate us one from another. Prodigal love is not stingy, being doled out sparingly, but is recklessly extravagant. Prodigal love does not do a cost-benefit study before acting, it does not do a risk assessment study either, but it loves without regard to the risk or cost of doing so.

This prodigal love is God's love. When Jesus gives us the commandment to love one another as he loved us, this is the love that Jesus is talking about. Jesus is most assuredly not talking about a love that exists only for some and not for all. Jesus is not talking about a love that insists, especially under threat of violence, on its own way. Jesus is not talking about a kingdom of domination of some over most, or wealth in the hands of a few at the expense of the many. These things are not love at all. They are the signs of empire, and empire is precisely what Jesus railed against. It was that speaking out against all these things that are not love that led to his crucifixion.

Keep these thoughts in mind when we watch our movie this afternoon. Keep these thoughts in mind when you are standing at the polling station and casting your ballot in our federal election later this month.

When we truly love another, what matters to them, matters to us, and the thing that mattered most to Jesus was to serve the needs of others, particularly those who were marginalized. If we truly love Jesus, we demonstrate it by serving our neighbours, near and far, no matter the risk or cost to us.

When someone in our lives is that important to us, we tell others. When we share with others what God has done and is doing in our lives, what God means to us: that's a sign of our love and devotion.

When we are devoted to another, when we truly love another, it changes everything. May you be so changed by your relationship with God. Amen.