

Jesus, We Adore You
A Sermon delivered by Pastor John W. Bengston
Augustana Lutheran Church
Denver, Colorado
March 21, 2010

Three years ago about now, I had the privilege and honor of being in this pulpit to deliver the sermon on the very texts read today. Computers make retrieval of past material so easy that I looked back at that sermon. I thought it read quite well, so I considered delivering it again today. Then in reflection, it came to me that you may remember it and conclude that I was just being lazy offering the same sermon that I had already preached.

Still I wondered, how many would remember. To test that, I said to myself, “Self, ask them what nard is and what value a jar of nard would have today.” Then it occurred to me that engaging in that kind of dialogue in the sermon might be unmanageable, but if you do recall, please let me know after worship today. What is nard? What would be the dollar value of a jar full of nard that was equal to 300 denarii in Palestine 2000 years ago? The answers were in the sermon of three years ago.

In the record of John’s gospel, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped them with her hair was Mary, the sister of Martha. This act constitutes Mary’s worship of Jesus, an expression of her adoration of him, preparing him for his death and burial.

Long ago, I learned about the five parts of prayer. By mentioning this, I am not trying to limit prayer to five parts; you may experience many more, but I have found this helpful in reflecting on my own prayer life. Those five parts are: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication, and Intercession. ACTS 1. Right away, I find another possible part to add, and that would be silence – just being in the presence of God and being aware of the Lord’s presence without the need to offer words. I wish to place Mary’s act of anointing the feet of Jesus with the first part: adoration.

Her act is an extremely extravagant demonstration of her adoration, for, as the text tells us, nard was a “costly perfume.” Adoration is “to adore” and the definition of adore reads, in Webster’s Dictionary, “to regard with utmost esteem, love, respect; to honor, to worship.” An ancient hymn of the Church, called the Te Deum, begins, “You are God; we praise you. You are the Lord, we acclaim you. You are the eternal Father; all creation worships you...” (Te Deum Laudamus, LBW, #3). A song of adoration.

Pouring the jar of nard on the feet of Jesus and wiping them with her hair shows Mary worshiping and honoring Jesus. This scene is criticized by Judas as a waste but accepted by Jesus as honest adoration of one who believes and trusts in him.

Soon we will conclude the season of Lent, and you are well aware that the conclusion of Lent confronts us with Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem which we know brings him closer to his death. We move on to Maundy Thursday, the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples in the Upper Room, his night of prayer in the Garden

of Gethsemane, his arrest, trials, beatings, crucifixion, death, and burial. The days get darker and more somber the closer we come to Good Friday. That's what Mary's act portends today, the sacrifice and death of this one whom she adored and whom we still adore.

Surely, two weeks from today, we will celebrate the Day of the Resurrection of Our Lord, the most important festival of the year for us as Christians. We are to keep in mind all that leads up to Easter, from Mary's anointing of Jesus, anticipating his death, to the darkness of the day of his death. Easter is hallow without our participation in the full journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, Gethsemane, Calvary, and finally to eternity.

Mary's devotion and adoration, costly devotion and deep adoration, beckons us to the same. You and I today are invited to offer our costly adoration of Jesus, to be extravagant and reckless in our acts of devotion. We are to engage in giving honor to the Lord Jesus in ways that would look to the world as wasteful and foolish. The world challenges us by saying, "You need to prepare for your own retirement and not give money away until you have enough set aside for your own future. Charity begins at home, so get your own home in order before you try to help anyone else." But to the faithful, Mary's act of adoration and our discipleship proclaim **our great gratitude** for Christ Jesus' obedience, willingness, and commitment to be our Savior. As we heard read in the second lesson this morning, "I have come to regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

How do we adore Christ Jesus my Lord? I think about Mother Teresa's reply to some who observed the work of her Sisters of Mercy who would go into the streets of Calcutta every morning and rescue as many people as they could who were lying on the streets, too weak and sick to pick themselves up, and who would say to her, "Why do you do this. They are going to die anyway," to which she said, "Yes, they will, but with us they will die with care and dignity." In a figurative way, Mother Teresa and those who worked with her poured pure nard on the feet of dying people and in so doing expressed their adoration, praise, and love of Christ Jesus.

How do we pour the pure nard of worship on the feet of Jesus? What do we do that shows our adoration and praise of Christ Jesus? What reckless and faithful acts of love for the Lord have we poured out? This is not to provoke guilt, but simply to offer a means to continue our Lenten self-examination and reflection. How do I lay my life before the Lord Jesus that his will may be done through me on earth as it is in heaven.

Yes, O Christ, we do praise and adore you – inadequately, incompletely, and with obvious conflicts of interest. Please accept our praise and adoration as we continue to ask for your power to live as your trusting, obedient, generous, and faithful disciples. Amen.