

Thanksgiving and Stewardship, November 18, 2007, Commitment Sunday
 Second Baptist Church, Lincoln, NE, Robert C. Molby, Interim Pastor

Love Finds a Way

Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9 (John 12:1-8, Mary anoints Jesus')

[Responsive Reading # 661 Christian Love (I Cor. 13)]

Theme: We should be motivated by love as we think about our giving—love for God and love for what God loves.

⁶⁾ While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, ⁷⁾ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸⁾ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹⁾ “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

¹⁰⁾ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing o me. ¹¹⁾ The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²⁾ When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³⁾ I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (NIV)

(State the theme for the sermon that is stated above)

Here is a supper given in honor of Jesus. It is at the home of a man known as Simon the Leper. The fact that people are there suggests that he is a healed leper because people shunned lepers in those days, desiring no contact with them lest they also come down with leprosy. That the dinner was in honor of Jesus suggests to us that Simon was one of those lepers who had been healed by Jesus.

Into this scene comes a woman with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. As Mark records this story he tells us that the jar was broken in order to release the contents. In other words the jar was sealed; once broken its value decreased significantly. Furthermore, she wastes the contents by pouring it on the head of Jesus.

We know little about the woman. John identifies her with Mary; Luke calls her a “sinner”. It may be that she was not supposed to be there but she found a way; love always finds a way.

I think about that jar of perfume. It is a symbol of unmeasured generosity of giving. It is the maximum sacrifice that does not calculate what might have been a passable minimum. This is a very expensive act of giving. Bible scholars have estimated the jar of perfume worth \$240 in purchasing power at that time. That was probably more than a couple of year’s wages—maybe much more. In the words of Luke it was self-giving in “good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over” (Luke 6:38). She didn’t just pour out a few drops and say, “Well, I guess that ought to be enough for this occasion.” The Interpreter’s Bible Commentary says that she was lifted clear out of herself in a great devotion (Vol. 7, p. 868, Col. A).

That same commentary goes on to say: “Her unblocked impulse moved Jesus. The spontaneity of love had free way. It was not smothered with caution and prudence. She was lifted clear out of arithmetic into love—one of the greatest leaps which a life can ever take.

“...This scene...speaks powerfully of the consecration of personality, the unmeasured sharing of the best that we are and have. Personality is a precious perfume. It is always a tragedy to carry it though life in an unbroken jar. Yet many have done exactly that. They have reserved themselves, their affection, their possibility outgoing to those in deep need of friendship, comfort, incentive. Such people wait for an audience that seems worthy of their self-giving, or an occasion important enough to call for it. Life slips by and the perfume jar is never broken. Others always measure themselves out with a medicine dropper, frightened lest they spend a drop more than the legalities of the situation demand.

“There is profound historical truth in the words **What she has done will be told in memory of her.** For the greatest events in life, in themselves everlasting memorials, have been those acts in which one person has broken that box of precious perfume which was himself, in the sharing of all his best. It has been done times without number by parent, teacher, pastor, physician, and friend. It is the most important transaction which this planet ever witnesses” (Ibid.).

Jesus was moved by this act of giving. I wonder, is Jesus moved by our giving? In what way is he moved?

Love finds a way. Does love motivate your giving? What does motivate your giving? Is it love for God and what God loves that motivates you?

This woman did not even think about the tithe, or the giving of 10 %. She gave it all! We teach that we ought to give 10 percent but not many of us do. The average gift that people give in the United States is calculated at a little over 2 percent.

If we really loved God we would find a way to make our giving significant and meaningful.

You have probably already made up your mind as to what your pledge for 2008 to 2nd Baptist Church is going to be. For many it will be the same as last year and for some that will be a sacrifice—especially if you have lost your job or have been ill. Have you ever calculated what you give in comparison to your income? I did that and was surprised at what I discovered. I was better off not knowing and thinking that I was doing pretty well. I discovered that we were not doing as well as we thought we were.

I challenge you to do that and to exceed what you did in 2007 for 2008. If you are now giving 5 percent of your income I challenge you to raise that to 6 percent; if you give 6 percent raise it to 7 percent, and so forth. It might be good for us as a church to do the same thing.

I remember a time I helped Rev. Palmer Swenson in the Alive in Mission program in our state. Fayette and I had already talked of how much we thought we could give to that program before I had my meeting with Palmer. I was asked to be his assistant in that program that raised 30 million dollars nationally for new church development. Palmer suggested that before we asked others to give we ought to make our own pledges. I told him that Fayette and I had discussed this and that we had made our determination. He listened politely and then suggested that if we were going to challenge people we needed to challenge ourselves to do more than we thought we could. I don't know what Palmer's challenge was but it was quite a bit more than ours, I'm sure. Anyway, before our conversation was over I found myself doubling what Fayette and I had talked about. Then I had the task of going home and telling Fayette what I had done. For me that was the hardest part of that Alive in Mission Campaign. But, with God's help we were able to do more than we thought we could. It was in keeping with that verse we have been saying to one another recently, and we need to keep on saying: “To God who is able to do immeasurably

more than we all can ask or imagine; to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, for ever and ever. Amen!”

I don't remember what the goal was for American Baptists of NE but it seems like it was something in the \$400,000 area and it seems that \$600,000 was raised. As a denomination we did raise that \$30 million which has been building churches ever since.

So, whatever it is that you are planning to pledge to the church for 2008, is it a challenge pledge? Is it something you know that you can do? How about making it something that you know that you can do only if God helps you? Without him you know that you cannot do it but with him it will be something beyond what you dreamed or imagined.

There is another great teaching in this passage of scripture. It is a picture of how God loves you and me, extravagantly and wastefully! And he found a way to do that through Jesus the Christ. His love for us has not diminished to this day. Jesus' life was broken on the Cross but, like the perfume this woman poured on Jesus' head, God's loved was poured out for us. How shall we respond to such love?

Let your love find a way; your love for God and the things that God loves.