

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

5th Sunday in Lent
March 21, 2010

Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁶Thus says the LORD,
 who makes a way in the sea,
 a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷who brings out chariot and horse,
 army and warrior;
they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
¹⁸Do not remember the former things,
 or consider the things of old.
¹⁹I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
 I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.
²⁰The wild animals will honor me,
 the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
 ²¹the people whom I formed for myself
 so that they might declare my praise.

John 12:1-8

¹Six 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."

“With What Kind of Passion?”

I want to tell you about Sonya. Like most 70 something year olds, Sonya's life is anything but boring. Her schedule would challenge any business executive any day. Here and there, always involved, always working, always volunteering, always welcoming...always involved.

Everyone is welcome in her home. You need not call first, just show up. You will usually find her in one of her tired old aprons wearing her bright pink Reebok sneakers with nylons and that beehive up there hairdo she has had for decades—even before the 70's she had that way up there hair—several shades ago, but the exact same style.

It is her, oh yes, for sure. But that hair barely fits in the 1978 gold Dodge Dart she still motors around town, to the church, and the grocery store. All the while she is talking. Sonya is a consummate talker. Its beyond chatty—she certainly is a consummate talker.

Not only is she a consummate talker—she is also a consummate baker. She is constantly baking something—cookies are her specialty. The sad truth is very few have ever eaten a cookie which is fresh from Sonya's oven. Given that she bakes constantly—one would expect piping hot and fresh cookies.

No, not a chance. Why? Because Sonya is not only a consummate baker, but a consummate freezer. Yes, she is one of those freezer types. She lives alone, but she has a freezer big enough for a third world nation. Indeed, all the baking she does is for the freezer.

One never gets to eat a fresh cookie because there are always ones in the freezer which need to be used first. The depth of frost on the top of the cookie determines freshness with Sonya's cookies. The deeper the frost, the longer it has been there. Some of that frost is pretty deep.

Frankly, some of those cookies when they come out of that freezer are pretty hard to identity. Not to mention the fact that much of what is

packed in that vast expanse of ice berg would probably be labeled U.F.O.—not Unidentified Flying Object, but Unidentified Frozen Object.

Hey, I have a few of those in the recesses of the Frigidaire. I would bet that you do too. This woman cornered the market. If you can freeze it, if you can even think it possibly could be frozen, if you would dare to freeze what no one has ever frozen before—Sonya has frozen it. It is there; tucked away for safe-keeping it is there. That is Sonya.

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There is another—this one named Mary. She has invited guests to dinner. Jesus is there. It is, as the gospel writer sets it up, the evening before Palm Sunday. This woman takes that which is of great price—a perfume worth so much that someone who earned the wages of a laborer—it would take such a person an entire year to earn the amount of money it would take to buy this perfume.

Mary takes that perfume and she pours it out over the feet of Jesus. She anoints him with it—and then she wipes his feet with her hair.

Judas protests because she has wasted so much on this anointing. That lavish perfume could have been sold and the money saved up for a different use.

Jesus rebukes the protest and says, “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.”

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Two women. Sonya. Mary. Two very different women. They are women with very different perspectives.

I am convinced that with our living we are more like Sonya than we are like Mary. I am also convinced that in our living we should be less like Sonya and more like Mary.

Mary was extravagant. Mary was passionate. Mary was Christ centered.

We tend to be like Sonya—crazy busy but more part of the frozen chosen. Not that we are filling actual freezers, but that the way we live we are cold and packing away our lives in little containers never to recovered from the frost.

We're busy making sure that no one, not even us, can read through the frost to tell what's really in there. Not Mary—everyone in the house that evening could tell where her heart was—that passion love down there wiping Jesus' feet. Women did not uncover their hair. There had to have been some gasps from the other guests when she poured that perfume, and then let down her hair.

Oh, that is the compelling life we are being called to as followers of Christ—not the tight piled high bee hive up in the air hair. God is yearning for us to let our hair down and become these people with this Mary-like kind of passion.

Mary was extravagant. Was she ever. Sonya has not been extravagant in decades. The most extravagant thing she did was buy a bigger freezer back in the 80's. But Mary, she epitomizes extravagance.

What she did with that perfume. It was the most expensive and fragrant essence one could get their hands on—so concentrated that just the very minutest portion would have been sufficient to gently touch Jesus with and demonstrate her love. But she took the whole thing and she

anointed his feet with it. The most precious thing she owned—she took the whole thing and she spent it all on Jesus.

**Love is not love if it counts the cost. She did not count the cost.
Love is not love if it counts the cost.**

We tend to count the cost. We look at our lives like it were a freezer full of containers of food. Wondering if we use this one—if we dare to thaw long enough to use a portion of it—will there be enough stored up for later?

The example of Mary is one that calls us to quit storing up for the later the love God has given us today. Put it out there—that is really how it is to be.

Love is not love if it counts the cost. It gives all and the only regret is that it has not still more to give. What do we do with our love as we approach this season of growing—this way of the cross—this march to Jerusalem?

**What are we doing? Are we freezing up? Or are we thawing out?
Are we being extravagant?**

**Are we being extravagant with our possessions? With our money?
With our love? Are we being extravagant with our motivations? Oh look at Mary. Mary was the listener and Martha was the doer. The extravagance here is that Mary was motivated to do something—to respond to that love from Jesus.**

Her extravagance did not count what it would cost her in giving up the perfume—her extravagance was going the distance FOR JESUS.

Extravagance—going the distance FOR JESUS. Going the distance FOR someone other than self... Live out of extravagance. Go the distance. If we are counting the cost of love, then it is not love....

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Mary was passionate. You talk about passion. What she did with that perfume and then what she did with her hair. That was an act of passion. The psalmist says, “Thou anointest my head with oil.” (Psalm 23:5)

In her passion she is so humbled that she anoints not only his head but his feet. Then she lets down her hair and she wipes, dries, and massages those feet. Such a move would have been viewed as less than proper in that culture.

But this is an act of purest passion. The problem with passion and us is we tend to be more like Sonya than Mary. You don’t see much real passion in our living. Changing the brand of freezer bags is not passion Sonya.

My friends, let your hair down—love the love..be the people of passion. Let yourself fall in love with Jesus all over again. And if you have never been in love with Jesus or have a hard time even using that language—fall into it...fall in love with Jesus.

There he is ready and waiting for us to relax into him—to let our hair down and show some passion. Can anyone tell that you, that we, love Jesus? Does it show? Does what we show demonstrate anything about our relationship with the one that ends up cross hung?

If your feelings are frosty—if your hair is in a knot—and oh church, we church folk tend to be frosty and knotted. It is time for us to thaw ourselves out and let our hair down and love, love, love—HIM!

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Yes, Mary was passionate—but do not miss the detail of the object of her passion. Mary was Christ centered.

That is where we are to be.

I suppose you could even say Sonya is passionate. She had a passion for filling her freezer. That big deep freeze is chocked full of containers of cookies and soup and vegetables and cake and who knows what all else. You come over she will share with you, but ultimately it is about her—it is self centered.

Such is the danger of humanity—even for those of us who are spiritual... It is the danger; the danger is that our passions end up focused only on ourselves. The focus becomes one of what we can get; it is all about what we have—the quality and quantity of stuff and time and emotions that is mine and yours.

That focus was not Mary's. She was in this all the way. Right there fully present in that moment. The extravagance of the perfume demonstrated it. Mary's focus was on the One—on Him—she was centered in Christ.

Let your hair down. Thaw out. Quit fooling around—getting nowhere.

Find the center.

He is the center—for us—for this time—for this life... We tend to make it about us—it is not about us, it is about Him. It is about the fact that he went this way that he went for us.

That in God's love, revealed to us in that Palestinian Jew—in him the cross was real—in him the death happened. For us. On our behalf.

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

She did not want to sidestep the cross or deny it. She saw him and the way he was going to go. She gave herself into that—into him. She saw him as that which was to be her center—her true north.

But, is he ours?

Is he? The time has come—with every passion and all extravagance—the time has come for Jesus to be our center. Amen.