

John 12 1-11
Tim Anderson 21/1/2018

It was Cherida's birthday a week ago.
A few days before her birthday,
she came to me with her ipad loaded onto ebay,
and asked me to push the 'purchase now' button.
Well it was a \$30 bottle of perfume as a birthday present.
And she wanted me to push the button,
so I could say that I bought her something for her birthday.
Mind you she had to do the work
of searching for the fragrance she wanted.
But only \$30 for a big bottle of perfume.
Don't you think Cherida is worth more than that?

Well thankfully Cherida doesn't measure the esteem she is held in
by the price tag on the perfume.
Clive Christian's Imperial Majesty perfume at \$215K/bottle
is just not necessary for her.
Which is lucky because I couldn't afford it.
But even if I had that sort of money lying around,
Cherida would want me to do something 'useful' with it.

In John chapter 11, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.
Lazarus had been dead for four days.
He was wrapped in grave clothes and buried in a tomb.
And Jesus raised him back to life.
You can understand that Lazarus and his two sisters
were pretty grateful to Jesus.
So it's not surprising that next time Jesus is in Bethany,
Lazarus' and his sisters' home town,
There is a dinner put on in his honour.

I mean, if someone saved your life,
you'd want to do something like that, wouldn't you?
So Martha is serving at the table -
completely in character
from another instance we read about in Luke's gospel,
and Lazarus is eating at the table with Jesus and some others.
And Mary poured some very expensive perfume on Jesus.
Even including on his feet
and then she wiped them clean with her hair.
Now when I say very expensive perfume,
I mean very expensive perfume.
I paid about \$30 for Cherida's perfume.
Some of you might pay more for perfume than that -
maybe not.
If you bought Chanel #5 from Myer it would cost \$174.
This perfume that Mary poured on Jesus was worth about \$50K.
And she didn't just dab a little on him.
She poured out the whole bottle.
So that is a seriously expensive scent.
The nice smell might have lasted for a day.
So Jesus smelled nice for about \$2000 per hour.
Was it worth it?
Well that was the question of Judas.
He was really only interested
in getting his hands on the money himself,
But he said,
"This perfume could have been sold
and the money given to the poor."
And if you discount Judas' dodgy motivation,
This raises an interesting ethical question.
Is it a good thing to pour \$50K of perfume on Jesus' feet?
Does Jesus really want that kind of extravagance

Or would Jesus himself prefer to feed the hungry?
That's the reason I buy Cherida a \$30 bottle of perfume –
Because she doesn't want me to be extravagant
when there are more important things for us to spend our money on.
What about Jesus?
What are his thoughts?
“Leave her alone,”
Jesus replied.
“It was intended that she should save this perfume
for the day of my burial.
You will always have the poor among you,
But you will not always have me.”
That might give you a bit of a shock.
Jesus is quite comfortable
with a \$50K bottle of perfume being used on his feet.
Why is Jesus not like Cherida?
Why is Jesus not concerned about being self indulgent?
Or let's ask the real question –
Why is Jesus not concerned about being worshiped?
Because isn't that what it is?
An extra slice or two of chocolate brownie might be self indulgent.
A \$50K bottle of perfume on your feet,
And the giver of the perfume wiping it off your feet with her hair,
That's not self indulgence –
That's allowing someone to worship you.
And Jesus is not uncomfortable with that.
Jesus is worth worshiping.
Jesus is God the Son.
And he knows that it's appropriate for Mary to acknowledge that.
Jesus created the perfume that was poured on his feet.
Jesus brought Mary's brother back to life.
Jesus gave Mary herself life.

Jesus knows
that Mary is not taking food out of a poor person's mouth
by pouring perfume on Jesus' feet.
There was then, as there is now,
plenty of food in the world to feed the poor.
What is required is the people act with justice.
What's the best way to encourage justice?
Get people to worship the Lord Jesus.
Then justice will flow like rivers
and righteousness like a never failing stream.
God had chosen Mary for the gift of eternal life –
And Jesus would be sharing his inheritance with Mary for eternity.
Whichever way you look at it,
Mary's act of worship and adoration of Jesus is entirely appropriate.
More than that it is beautiful.
It's an action that comes from the deep love of her heart.
The love of her heart is pouring out into the perfume on Jesus' feet.

Should our love for Jesus be any less than Mary's?
When Jesus hung on the cross for Mary's sins,
He was there for yours and mine too.
The life that Jesus gave to Lazarus
is the same life that he gives to you and me.
We have just as much reason to love Jesus as Mary did.

How would we do a similar thing to Mary today?
Jesus is not around,
so we can't pour perfume on him.
How do we show our love for Jesus?

Well one way to show love for Jesus today is to love his church.
The church is the body of Christ.

We are the face of Christ to the world.
So loving Christ can be acted on by loving his church.
In days gone by, people often expressed love for the church
in grand buildings with impressive architecture.
The Cathedrals of Europe,
ornate structures that were both beautiful and expensive,
were built as a way of expressing love for Christ.
And look, in their defence,
I think the thing that matters to Jesus
is the heart of the person expressing devotion.
Jesus didn't praise Mary's action
because he particularly wanted to smell nice.
Jesus didn't praise Mary's action
because his body needed to be anointed before his death.
He praised her action because he saw in her a heart of true devotion.
And such devotion was all the more praiseworthy
because it was a week out from his death for Mary, and for all of us.
So with the Cathedrals of Europe,
if they were built with hearts of devotion for the Lord Jesus,
then I'm sure he accepts that with the heart it was given.
And I have no doubt that some of the builders
who slaved away for generations
did so with love for Jesus in their hearts.

Of course the thing that is often raised is 'What about the poor?'
The church has all this expensive property and art works.
By which people I guess are thinking mostly of the Vatican.
If we have all this money,
shouldn't we be using it to care for the poor?

And look there's a valid point there.
Sometimes there is a thin line between devotion to Jesus

and a cushy life for those who work for the church.

When ministers live in houses

far more fancy than the houses of the folk in their churches

it makes me cringe.

Which is not to say that the people who gave towards those projects didn't have true devotion in their hearts to Jesus.

But it is to say that the people

who encouraged the direction that the devotion should be headed in might have been self serving.

What we need to remember is that the church is the people.

When we say, "We are the body of Christ,"

that is what we are expressing.

So if we are going to show love for Jesus by loving his body, then it's the people that love should be focused on.

So you could love Jesus by loving the other people here today.

And you could even do it in really costly ways.

Like Mary who used her most precious possession to love Jesus,

You could be extravagant in your love for fellow believers

Or even for non believers in a way that wins them to faith.

Tim Winton is a famous Australian novelist.

He wrote "Cloudstreet" among others.

He's won the Miles Franklin award four times.

He became a Christian after his father had a motorbike accident.

His Dad needed to be lifted physically and put into the bath

A couple of times a week for a wash.

Trouble was his Dad was a big man

and his Mum couldn't physically manage the lifting.

A bloke in the local church

heard about the problem in the Winton household,

and came around and washed Tim Winton's Dad

twice a week for months.

And that extravagant love convinced Tim Winton to follow Jesus.
That's quite an appropriate application of Mary's perfume –
Since it would have made Tim's Dad smell nice!
You could love Jesus by supporting the ARDF.
Kim Smith for ARDF is going to visit us in Feb.
Those guys support life changing projects
run through the Anglican Church in poor countries.
Loving Jesus by loving his body.

Probably, most of you here today find it far easier
to relate to applying the story of Mary in that way,
Than in building an imposing Cathedral.
Thing is we are going to have a building project here.
We are going to be called on love Jesus
By building a structure that is used to honour and worship him.
So how should we think about that act of devotion to Jesus?
Well while I said before
that I'm sure Jesus looks at the hearts of the people
who are doing the act of devotion to him.
And so in that sense,
It doesn't matter if you build something of no practical value.
If you are given the opportunity to think about it before you start,
And work out what sort of a building serves Jesus,
Then I'm sure the thinking can be offered to Jesus as a gift too.

So what kind of building serves Jesus?
The kind of building that serves Jesus
is the kind of building that helps people honour and worship him.
If a building can move people in the direction of Mary's devotion,
Then that building honours Jesus.
If it's hard for a young mum to worship Jesus
in a church that doesn't have a crying room,

then it honours Jesus to get one.
If people are enabled to connect with one another over a meal,
Then it honours Jesus to enable that with a kitchen.
Notice that in this story
Jesus is sharing a meal with Lazarus and some friends.
It's remarkable in the gospels,
How often Jesus connects with people over a meal.
People get themselves so busy,
That meals are a perfect place to folk to talk with one another.
Everyone has to stop and eat sometime.
Why shouldn't some of that eating happen in a place
where the conversations
can be intentionally focused on honouring Jesus?
Another thing that honours Jesus
is when his church is a sweet aroma in the community.
How can the church be a sweet aroma in the community?
One way is by individuals from the church
being like the bloke who washed Tim Winton's dad.
Finding a need and sacrificially meeting it.
But another way is by working together
in a way that provides resources to be a blessing in the community.
Running an Op Shop does that.
So providing a building that is a good space for an Op Shop
Is a way to make the body of Christ a sweet smell in the community.
Pouring a pint of pure nard on the community's view of Jesus.
Well hopefully that might help you to see,
That a building project in a church
Is not about us having comfortable club rooms
for our nice little religious club.
It's about thinking hard
about how to get people to worship and honour Jesus.

Nevertheless you could be excused
for feeling like it's a bit removed from Mary.
I mean all of Jesus' disciples loved him and followed him.
But Mary's action with the perfume and her hair
was something different from the normal love expressed to Jesus.
At the end of this gospel,
Jesus says to Peter,
"Do you love me?"
And Peter protests,
"Lord you know that I love you".
But he wouldn't even need to ask Mary, would he?
Her action has demonstrated to the world that she loves Jesus.
Wouldn't it be nice to be able to do something that expressive
to show Jesus we love him now?
I mean directly to him,
Not loving him by loving the body of Christ, the church.
But showing love directly to Jesus.

I think the closest thing you are going to get
is to develop a deep prayer life.
Prayer is the deepest and most personal connection
you can have with Jesus today.
A few years ago I read a book,
"Prayer: experiencing awe and intimacy with God."
It made me realise that my prayer life could go a whole lot deeper.
And in the times when I put into practice
the suggestions in that book,
prayer does become more of an expression of love for Jesus.
I've got a copy.
So one person can borrow it today.
First in best dressed.
But Koorong has plenty more copies if you miss out.

Today we've looked at a story of great expressive devotion to Jesus.
A \$50K bottle of perfume on Jesus' feet.
Wiping his feet clean with her hair.
And Jesus said that's OK.
Because as the creator,
As the one who died for our sins,
He is worth worshiping.
You can offer Jesus that devotion by loving his body the church.
You can offer Jesus that devotion in prayer.
They are both good ways to express our love of Jesus.
So let's pray that we might be given the strength to do that.