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John 12:1-8

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Have you ever asked the right question for the wrong reason?

- I'm convince

- that's what Judas does in our reading today from the Gospel of John.

- Judas asks - -

“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii

- and the money given to the poor?” (John 12:5)

- He asks the question, of course, because

- Mary has just used a pound of pure nard

- to anoint Jesus' feet.

- In today's world that would be like taking a \$30,000 bottle of perfume

- and pouring in over someone's feet.

- It is an act of extravagance

- that is startling and unexpected

- and had I been in Judas' shoes

- and witnessed this act of extravagance,

- I'm not sure how I would have responded.

- I probably stood there in shock and confusion - -

- perhaps I might have said something like

“What are you doing?”

- or

“Do you know what you just did?”

- After all,

- when the cost of an SUV is being used on someone’s feet,

-how could you not stand in amazement -

- and at least raise a concern. - -

- So I give Judas credit for essentially asking

- the right question, - -

- namely, - -

- How do we as people of God

- make the best use of our resources

- to accomplish the ministry

- that God has called us to do?

- Now the text says Judas asked his question

- because he wanted to be able to steal from the money

- that the sale would have generated, - -

- so his motivations were not exactly pure,

- but the question he raises is one that we as Christians face on a daily basis

- how **do** we faithfully

- make the best use of our resources

- to accomplish the ministry

- that God has called us to do?

- In Mary's case,
 - she appears to have been called to a ministry
 - of preparation - -
 - preparing Jesus and the disciples
 - for his journey to Jerusalem
 - and his impending death.
 - Her decision to anoint Jesus' feet with this nard,
 - of course,
 - raises the possibility that she is wasting a valuable resource,
 - but Jesus quickly helps Judas,
 - helps us to see
 - that what she is doing
 - is not wasting a resource,
 - but rather investing the resource she was given
 - to accomplish the ministry God was calling her to do.
 - Anointing Jesus' feet
 - was an act of love
 - that reflected the abundant love God shows to us. - - -
 - She shares a sign
 - that helps prepare Jesus and his followers
 - for the death that awaits him in Jerusalem.
- The ministry with the poor that Judas speaks of

- was an important and necessary ministry,
 - but it wasn't Mary's ministry - - -
 - and as Jesus points out
 - the amount of money that the nard represents
 - even as large an amount of money as that was
 - wouldn't solve the problem of poverty
 - "You always have the poor with you,
But you do not always have me."
(John 12:8)

- In other words,
 - the long-term solution to the problem of inequity and poverty
 - lies not in a one-time financial gift,
 - but rather in the radically different world -
 - that is created by God's love for all people -
 - through Jesus.

- The investment Mary makes in Jesus, - -
 - the example of abundant love she pours over Jesus
 - as he begins his journey to the cross and the empty tomb
 - is not a foolish waste of resources,
 - but rather a wise and necessary choice
 - that allows Mary to accomplish her ministry.
- A ministry which helps set the stage for the saving act

- that Jesus is undertaking.
- Now for you and for me
 - the question of how we use our resources to accomplish the ministry
 - God has called us to do
 - may not require us to consider spending \$30,000
 - on foot ointment, –
 - but the question of how we act as good stewards
 - of the gifts God has given us, - -
 - the question of how we manage the good news
 - that God has invested a great deal
 - in each and every one of us, - -
 - the question of how we make the best use of the resources God has given us
 - to accomplish the ministry
 - that God has called us to do, - -
- well
 - that is a question that we are called to answer
 - each and every day in our own lives.
- On a personal level
 - that means that each of us is looking for opportunities to invest
 - the gifts God has given us in ways
 - which match the ministry God has called us to do.
- so for example

- for some people one of the ministries God calls them to do is
 - is the ministry of parenting or grandparenting.
 - If that's your calling, then the way that you invest your time,
 - your talents
 - and your financial resources
 - teaches your children and grandchildren
 - something about what you believe
 - and about what is important to you.
- So if you invest more of your time in watching television shows
 - than you invest in your relationship with my children,
 - then they know TV is more important to you than they are.
- If you invest your talents for singing
 - in singing in worship,
 - then they discover that it is important to use your gifts
 - in your relationship with God,
- and if your family
 - invest some of the financial gifts God has given you
 - in supporting ministries you believe in -
 - then they see though you,
 - what God's generosity and compassion
 - look like in action. - -
- Your ministry may be music.

- Your ministry may be caring for a parent in need.
 - Your ministry may be rebuilding homes
 - or speaking up for the outcasts in society, - -
 - only you truly know
 - what ministry you feel God is calling you to do,
 - but whatever your ministry is
 - whatever God calls you to do in this world, - -
 - the good news is
 - that God has entrusted you with valuable gifts. - -
 - God has given you a pound of Nard,
 - if you will,
 - to use for that ministry
 - and God has given you the freedom
 - to invests those gifts to make that ministry happen.
- Which is why,
 - I think Judas' question is helpful,
 - because it reminds us that how you invest your God given gifts
 - can be an important witness to what you believe
 - and to who you are.
- Let's face it,
 - our world gets terribly wound up
 - in money and possessions,

- in what we have and what we don't have.
- We obsess over the latest gadgets and toys. -
- We watch shows about lottery dream homes.
- We marvel at the lives of the ultra-rich. - -
- In that process, we create a society where people are
 - running and running and running
 - trying to get more and more
 - just so they can have more and more. - -
- There's only one problem ,-
 - **'more'** isn't an attainable goal. -
 - There will always be someone with more. -
 - If you are judging your life -
 - by dollars and things,
 - what you have
 - will always be less than what you could have, -
 - but the good news that Mary teaches us
 - is that it's not what you have that counts,
 - but rather
 - what you do with the gifts God has given you
 - that can make a lasting impression in this world.
- I mean,
 - if the disciples had sold the perfume

- and feed 2500 people,
 - those people would have been satisfied for a time,
 - and there is no doubt that meeting the needs of the hungry -
 - that addressing the symptoms of inequity and poverty
 - is important
 - while we are working on the root causes
 - of inequity and poverty,
 - but those folks would have been hungry again fairly soon,
 - and my guess is
 - that story probably wouldn't have
 - made it in scripture.

- By investing

- this valuable gift
 - in an abundant expression of love for Jesus,
 - by investing this valuable gift
 - to fulfill the ministry of preparation she was called to do,

- Mary provides an example

- that I believe can encourage you and me
 - and countless other Christians
 - to seek out a way to invest the gifts God has given us
 - to accomplish the unique ministry
 - God had called each of us to do.