**Series: What Jesus Would Say**

*VBC*

*Pastor John Johnson*

*John 12:1-8*

*August 31-September 1, 2013*

**“Don’t Miss Your Moment”**

Here’s a news story from this last week—

-Vincent Bright pleaded guilty on Monday of disinterring his father’s body from a Detroit cemetery

-Vincent [stole the body](http://detroit.cbslocal.com/2013/01/14/casket-with-body-inside-stolen-from-detroit-cemetery/) of his 93 year-old father, Clarence, from Gethsemane Cemetery on January 14, just hours before it was to be buried, and stored it in a home freezer

-Police said Vincent Bright is a religious man who took the body *in hopes his father would be resurrected*.

In John 12, Jesus was also in trouble with the authorities for interring a body from the grave

-raising Lazarus from the dead pushed the religious police over the edge

-and so they sent out an arrest warrant—11:57

-but before His arrest—Jesus was the guest of a party in Bethany—*read verses 1-2*

-this story falls in the center of the book—chap 12 is sometimes referred to as the “saddle” of the book

-when you look either north or south on the Pend Oreille, you see mountain peaks that are united by “saddles” that allow climbers to move from one mountain peak to the next (Kayak picture)

-this chapter functions like a saddle allowing movement from one peak (1-11) to the next (13-21)[[1]](#endnote-1)

-the next peak is the upper room, Gethsemane, and Jerusalem

-but in this in between—there is a party, the triumphal entry, a thunderous voice from heaven, and a final speech

-things are shifting from a more public ministry to one private with His disciples

-Jesus’ seizure was imminent—the trial would be in a few days, the interrogation, and the death

*-the hour that Jesus talked about is almost here—12:23*

-but for the moment—Jesus was at a party

-verse 2 tells us Martha was in the kitchen—where else?—ensuring Mideast hospitality was carried out

-making sure enough humus was on the table

-the bread, olive oil and vinegar and wine—the fried goats cheese, the grape leaves, the lamb

-one can imagine the joy, the talk with a man risen from the dead

-the questions—*what was it like on the other side?*

-how does it feel being called back down from the majors?

-and then—something outrageous happened—

-something that brought the party to a stop—*read verse 3*

1. Mary took 327.45 grams of fragrant oil—the kind extracted from a nard plant—the kind found only in the distant mountains of Nepal

-so valuable it equaled one year’s earnings (40-50,000 dollars)

-it might have represented the family inheritance—or Mary’s dowry—perhaps her ticket to marriage—*it was her future*

-in the span of a moment—it was spent

2. She poured it on Jesus’ feet

-only the most menial of servants touched the dirt ridden, smelly, callous feet of another

3. but Mary more than touched—she bathed His feet

-massaged them with her hair—the symbol of her glory

-she uncovered and unfastened her hair to do this

-something that went outside the bounds of propriety and piety for a woman in ANE culture

-this was like a woman *hitching up a long skirt to her thighs*[[2]](#endnote-2)

-this was extravagant, unrestrained devotion

-an ultimate pledge of loyalty to Jesus[[3]](#endnote-3)

-and in this moment—the fragrance took hold of the house

-others things took hold—amazement, shock, bewilderment—and anger

Illustration—once when a core of our leaders were meeting at our home in Holland, a wealthy parishioner drove up, walked in, and threw 4000 dollars on the table

-he wanted to make a statement—impress us with his money and his devotion

-but we gave it back—and asked him to never give in this way again

-this was different—this was not show, display, exhibition

-this was giving everything—intended for the audience of one

-but some were not so impressed—*read verses 4-5*

-for at least one at this dinner—this was gross excess—this was waste

-this was *conduct unbecoming, improper, unacceptable, and inappropriate for a woman*

-most of all—this was social irresponsibility!!

-parallel accounts tell us the other disciples were disgusted—(cf Mk 14:4; Matt 26)

-they too joined in and scolded Mary—raising similar matters—do you realize how many starving people there are in Africa?

-how many Syrian refugees there are tonight in Lebanon?

-WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?

*-and in all of this they probably assumed they were being stewardly, prudential, fiscally responsible—even charitable*

*-might even thought that they were helping Jesus out of an awkward moment*

(that was nice Mary—but a little over the top)

Application—at this point in the story we have to ask ourselves—what would we have been thinking?

-would we have been impressed with Mary’s devotion?

-or would we be with Judas, the practical, social activist?

-as John recounts the night—he exposes motives—*read verse 6*

-looking back years later—John could see that Judas’ first concern was always for Judas

-this was not a social activist—this was Bernie Madoff

-Judas was a fraud, a thief—whose practice was to steal, embezzle, skim off the top

-Jesus also knows Judas—has known him from the beginning—6:64

-knows he is a man filled and controlled by the devil 13:2, 27

-knows there is no truth in him—knows he is the epitome of evil—6:70; 8:44

-knows that he remains in unbelief

-unbelief that has fleshed itself out in envy and resentment and greed and treachery

-and now He speaks to Judas—one of the shortest conversations in John—*read verses 7-8*

-Mary and Judas are antitypes—placed side by side as contrasts to one another

-she is generous/he is a thief—she is a giver/he is a taker

-she is part of God’s kingdom/he is part of Satan’s domain

-she is *the* lover/he is *the* betrayer

-she gets it/he doesn’t

Here’s what she gets—and we must get

*1. WHATEVER IS IN OUR CARE BELONGS TO GOD FOR GOD’S PURPOSES*

-notice what Jesus says—“Mary “kept”—not owned

-she saw her responsibility was one of guarding God’s property—and keeping it for His purposes

-that whatever is in our care, *in our keeping*, belongs to God—

*-“the earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants belong to the Lord”—Ps 24:1*

*-“the heavens, indeed the highest heavens, belong to the Lord, as does earth and everything in it”—Deuteronomy 10:14*

-all of His gifts, talents, resources, passions—are ultimately under our watch care in order to fulfill *His* intentions

*-we are not even our own—we have been bought with a price—I Corinthians 6:19-20*

-Mary was simply returning what was His

*2. GOD’S PURPOSES CANNOT ALWAYS BE MEASURED PRAGMATICALLY*

-Illustration—Bill Gates was once asked if he went to church and he replied no

-and when asked why he replied—*it is not a productive use of time*

-we’ve been trained to measure things this way

-we pride ourselves on being utilitarian, practical, efficient

-we tend to value what produces, contributes

-this of course can get us in occasional marital trouble

-a husband says to his wife—but wouldn’t it make more sense to use the money for your birthday to buy a new vacuum cleaner rather than a night at the coast?

-such thinking also would say anointing feet that are going into a grave does not seem to be a good use of expensive resources

-but *God has a different measurement* than ours—a much higher one

Application—occasionally someone will ask—wouldn’t have been more honoring to give the same money we spent on a sanctuary to meeting the poverty needs in Uganda?

-maybe—but sometimes God is pleased when we create something of sacred space to honor Him

-pleased when we invest in art and beauty—the sort that brings glory to God

-it’s not that Jesus was oblivious to the poor

-He was/is their greatest advocate

-He brought mercy—called for justice

*-but sacrifices brought to His altar matter*

-Solomon offered 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep at the dedication of the temple

-and “fire consumed them and the glory of the Lord filled the temple”—

2 Chronicles 7

-but no one asked why this was not given to alleviate hunger

Point—what looks like waste may be our best stewardship

*-and if this is hard to comprehend—it might say more about our heart for God than our heart for the poor*

*3. OUR LOVE FOR GOD WILL DETERMINE OUR GENEROSITY TO GOD*

-Mary was generous—radically generous—for one major reason—she was passionately in love with Jesus

-here was the Deliverer, the Resurrection, the Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Living Water

-she would tell us—this was not about her loss—this was about her gain

*-she lost what was expensive—but gained what really mattered*

-she is probably one of the richest saints in heaven

-when we move from worship of self to worship of God—devotion to God

-values in this present kingdom get turned upside down and inside out

*-generosity is the natural outcome of God’s transforming work*

*4. GENEROSITY TO GOD SEIZES DIVINE MOMENTS*

-moments come and go—and the opportunities that lie within them leave with them[[4]](#endnote-4)

-there are moments when it is too late

-Illustration— breaking my wife’s cell phone—we had never gotten insurance (too late and too bad)

-and this applies to spiritual matters

-somehow, some way, Mary knew this was a moment to be seized—to express devotion to Jesus

-she did something that could only be done now

-what they viewed as a wasteful act—a social custom taken to an unnecessary extreme

-she saw as a necessary and timely act, a preparation for burial

-an act that could only be seized in this moment

-sometimes it is too late for prayer—the time is past—the need is gone

-some day—it will be too late to invest in God’s kingdom

-when we get to heaven, our stewardship days will be over

-entering into eternity will not provide a second chance

CONCLUSION

This passage called Heather and I to sit down and evaluate

-we have given faithfully for all 38 years of our marriage—and we have never come up short because of—it’s just the opposite

-we again reviewed what we give to the church—*and should be giving*

-what we give to the poor—*and should be giving*

-what we give to special projects—*and should be giving*

-how much we should be keeping

—we only have this life to do this

-will you do the same?

1. Borchert, John 12-21, 30 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Tom Wright, John for Everyone, 22 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kenneth Bailey, Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes, 249 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Erwin McManus, Seizing Your Divine Moment, 24 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)