



“Outpouring Love”

Fifth Sunday in Lent
5:30 p.m. Saturday, March 12, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 43:16-21; John 12:1-8

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

So here's a question: how much does God love us? Or, how much do we, do you, love God? Yes, I realize that those aren't fair questions, so let me try this example, and then we'll get back to those questions.

Several years ago, when my dad was still alive, I started the habit of calling my parents every week, usually on Sunday afternoon. I was generally at home, as were they, and usually by that time of day I don't feel like doing much other than sitting, but I can talk on the phone, so I would call and we would chat. Well, really, it was more that my mom would chat, and dad & I occasionally got a sentence or two in. But that was fine. We didn't see each other all that often, as they were living in Florida, and I'm here in Pennsylvania, but we would get together usually at least once a year, maybe twice a year. But I called, even when I really didn't have anything to talk about. I called, because I knew they were getting older, and the time would come when they wouldn't be there to talk with.

I still call my mom, at least once a week. Depending on what kind of computer problems she's having, we will talk even more often than that. And with me living in Pennsylvania, and with her living in Florida, it can at times be a bit frustrating, since often the problems she encounters are ones that, were I physically present, or physically near-by, would be relatively easy for me to assist her. But I'm 1100 miles away, and even if there happens to be a flight down out of Harrisburg International, it would still be several hours before I could get to her (If I have to drive, I'm looking at about a seventeen hour straight drive, and that doesn't include potty breaks).

My sister, on the other hand, who lives in Wisconsin, *does not* call mom very often. My mother has made mention of that fact to me. Now, I do have to give my sister credit, lest you all get the false impression that I'm a much better child than my sister (which I am, but I just don't want to say that); my sister DOES talk with mom, almost nightly, only it's via one of those online chat programs (I think they use Instant Messenger; they've tried several). So my sister, my mom, my aunt (that is, Mom's sister), and my cousin all get online, and the four of them type away each night for an hour or more. Still, my mom would like my sister to actually *speak* with her, to hear her voice, more often than she does. Because I talk with my mom, does not make me a better son, or my sister a mediocre daughter. These are simply expressions of our love for our mother.

In our gospel lesson, we have one person's example of her love and devotion, of her outpouring of love.

In our story, Jesus and the disciples are at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (yes, *that* Lazarus - the "raised from the dead" guy). At some point (it kind of sounds as though it is happening either during or right after dinner), Mary comes along and washes Jesus' feet with oil. Which probably seems a bit weird to us, but we need to remember that in the Middle East 2,000 years ago, foot apparel was primarily either non-existent, or was sandals. So, as a good host, if you had a guest, you washed their feet. Or, actually, more likely, you *had* their feet washed by someone in your household with a lower social ranking than yourself. You washed your guest's feet, so they would feel refreshed, to get the grime and dirt off, and maybe, even, to help your house smell better, depending on what they might have accidentally stepped in.

Regardless, you washed your guests feet with *water*. Not *oil*. And especially, not *expensive, perfumed oil*.

So on the one hand, I have a bit of a difficult time *not* siding with Judas on this one. (Okay, so here's a quick side note: did you know that every time Judas is mentioned in John's gospel, there's always some brief little jab about the betrayal?) But Judas has a point: did Mary have to wash / bathe Jesus' feet with just the *nard*? At the least, why couldn't she have washed them with water, and then maybe simply dabbed some perfume on them, or even taken a cloth dipped in the oil and wipe his feet? Why did she have to take an entire **pound** of the stuff to clean his feet, and then dry them off with her hair?

Okay, so the place smelled great, I'm sure. But it does seem rather like a waste. I mean, even if she saved the stuff that dripped off his feet, they couldn't resell it, or probably even reuse it, because, I mean, that oil had been used on somebody's dirty, stinking, feet.

Why would Mary do such a thing? That's one of those questions which we don't get an answer for, at least, not from her. Jesus gives us the "she's preparing my body for burial" answer, which pretty much goes right over everybody's head.

But if you ask me, Mary does this weird act of bathing his feet with expensive oil pretty much out of . . . love. For whatever reason, for Mary, pouring all that oil onto Jesus' feet becomes the *best* way she can come up with to express her love for this friend, this teacher, this healer, this miracle worker, that she knows as Jesus.

So, now, after getting a little bit more into the lesson, maybe looking back at my opening example of calling and talking with my mom as a bit of an explanation of what I am attempting to say, let me slightly change the question that I started with and ask, instead of "How much do you love God," how about if I ask "What are some ways that we show our love of God?"

Perhaps one example is that yesterday, today, and tomorrow, here at Trinity, we've been doing this Weekend of Caring. Folks gathered this morning to put together food packages. There have been Trinity members at places like Pink Hands of Hope, helping to move merchandise and do some cleaning. We have collected food for the York County SPCA. We gathered all kind of goods - paper and edible - for places like the Ecumenical Food Pantry; New Hope Ministry; Bethesda Mission; and Domestic Violence. We asked for donations of books for our Trinity Tutors. We had a room of people upstairs working on quilts. And I am sure there was even more going on that I am forgetting to mention. Yet all those are just *some* of the examples that we have of expressing our love of God, and putting faith into action.

We do need to be careful, though, that we don't get so caught up in the *doing* part, that we over look, the faith part. Or start to think that the *doing* part *more important* than the believing part. Because we need to remember that *doing* does not cause God to love us, just like **not** doing does not cause God to **not** love us. God pours that divine love out upon us, regardless of what we do, or what we do not do.

That's what Jesus on the cross is all about. To remind us it's not about us; it's about God.

So tonight, as we leave, may we seek to pour out God's love on all those around us.

Amen.

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