

**Sermon Notes:** April 3, 2022

[Lent 5 Lectionary Readings](#)

**Focus:** Joyful and self-possessed people are the worst (Mary of Bethany)

In John 12, Mary of Bethany is the sibling of Martha and the recently ‘undeaded’ Lazarus. She was so self-possessed that the act of anointing Jesus’ feet was not an act of personal abasement but sprung from self-giving adoration. She anointed Jesus’ feet in the most extravagant, joyful way, without the concern about how Judas was gossiping about her.

Remember, Jesus had raised her brother from the dead, which at least in the Gospel of John’s telling, set everything in a different direction for Jesus. He loved Lazarus and headed to Bethany to save him. John’s gospel has an unusual order of events. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem happened after seeing Lazarus’ family (Think Palm Sunday reading, also Bethany is very close to the city). Jesus pulls Lazarus out of the tomb, goes to a dinner party, and then immediately comes into Jerusalem as King on a donkey. This juxtaposition was the last straw for the elite of Jerusalem.

I want to harp on this for a moment; the raising of Lazarus and Mary’s anointing followed by the triumphal entry precipitated an assassination plot. Lazarus’ resurrection is near the end of Act 1 in a two act play. At the end of Act 1, Lazarus’ family and friends were having Jesus over to celebrate Lazarus’ new lease on life. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were likely not some poor laborers, but a well-connected and respected family who were used to having dinner parties.

Judas got grumpy in part because he was jealous that the people who had means. He was mad at Mary who was not exclusively focused on enriching herself, unlike him, according to the Gospel later which labels him a thief.

**Note on Marys** Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene *are* separate people. Medieval Christianity has repeatedly conflated the two. Go to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary\\_of\\_Bethany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_of_Bethany) if you want the blow-by-blow of why I think this has been an oft repeated mistake. The sinful woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears in Luke is almost certainly not the same person as Mary of Bethany.

**Self-possession is a super-power** We usually think of Jesus as the superhero, but in this case, I hope you can see Mary of Bethany, as the one with courage, heart, and deep sense of personal integrity worth emulating. The following quote is a mis-mash of Walden and a Tik-toker that is excellent.

@joshterrplays is inspired by the book Walden says:

*In the book Walden he writes that most people live lives of quiet desperation, this becomes a reality when we choose not to act when we know we should a little too often. The people who live explosive abundant lives push the edges of capability.*

*It is on us to do things differently. If you express yourself in the highest form you can, you'll look like you're crazy to the people around you, but you'll also start to live a life of hope and meaning.*

*You will develop strength of certainty, vision, and capability that will make you untouchable to those who would want to bring you down and an inspiration to the ones who are ready to become better themselves.*

Let's step out a little more often for others, be willing to endure a little trash talk along the way. Mary of Bethany probably heard Judas' complaining, but her self-possession and her self-giving heart helped her stay focused on blessing Jesus.

May we keep our hearts fixed on generosity of spirit. We will hear the complaining, but it will be muted in comparison to the love we share. I am keen to practice this "dance like no one is watching" self-giving. I don't do it well at all. But I want to embrace the Gospel of John that invites me to know, believe, and find life in Jesus.

**More Mary, Less Judas** While we are on this journey, we will not be as self-possessed as Mary of Bethany. We will get blown out of the water by negative comments. We will ponder the "he said, she said" heard by the Judases of our everyday life. So, knowing this, why in the world would we think our own hot air would add anything to the spiritual journey of others?

Unsolicited advice is so easy. I was in the gym and a twentysomething woman was totally in her zone. Her headphones were on, and she was working hard. A seventy something man walked to her equipment, waited for her to finish her set, and said, "Working with that heavy of a weight is not flattering for a woman." If she had a paid trainer or workout partner who made the comment it would still be terrible, but it was unbelievable to me in this context. No words would have been just fine.

More Mary, less Judas. As you are practicing Mary, if you can't be self-possessed in face of Judas whining at you, at least you can walk away (unless Judas is your boss!)

Let me share a deep spiritual truth. Advice is a form of nostalgia. It's not very good reheated. But if you channel more Mary and less Judas, you will become a person whose help, advice, and generosity is sought out.

**Last thing** Joyful is even better *and harder* than self-possession. I leave you with Brené Brown:

*Joy is the most vulnerable emotion we experience,  
and if you cannot tolerate joy, you start dress rehearsing tragedy*

I am praying for our self-possession and bravery to be joyful people.

More Mary,  
Less Judas.

**Todd**