

# The Garden of Sacrifice

## John 12:1-8

### INTRODUCTION

Karen and I have lived in Springfield for almost 39 years now. In that time we have had many occasions to be driving back to Springfield from the east – down I-70, coming from the direction of Columbus.

- Whenever you make that drive, there is that moment when you begin to see the cross on the top of Weaver Chapel at Wittenberg University poking up above the tree line. It's off in the distance, but you can see the cross.
- Can you picture what I'm describing?

Maybe it is an occupational hazard, but I tend to notice church steeples.

- When my son was three years old, he could spot the golden arches of McDonalds off in the distance, and from the back seat you would hear him say "FRIES."
- Me, it's steeples.

Even if you are not a steeple person, let me plant that image in your mind this morning.

When you can see the cross, you are almost home.

These weeks leading up to Easter we are on a journey from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of the Empty Tomb. And along the way we are learning about the devastating impact that sin has on our world and in our lives. For me, the goal of this Lenten season is that you, with me, are beginning to long for that empty tomb on Easter Sunday.

As a part of our Lenten journey, I have asked you to memorize our theme verse for this year, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

I keep telling you that those words are important because the entire story of our redemption is the story of two gardens – from Garden to Garden. From Eden to the Empty Tomb. This memory verse illustrates that truth by associating two men with those two gardens: Adam and Jesus.

Over this past month, our Lenten journey has taken us to several gardens – most of which are not gardens in the literal sense, I know – but thank you for giving me the liberty to think about the places we have visited in garden terms. On our way to the Garden of the Empty Tomb we traveled from the Garden of Eden into gardens that I have labeled as temptation, desolation and unfruitful.

If you will recall from last week, our journey took us with the prodigal son into a pigsty. I called it "the garden of repentance." It was there, as he fought the pigs for food, that

this younger son made a decision that changed the trajectory of his life. Remember? He came to his senses and said:

I am going to go home! (Luke 15:18)

St. Augustine wrote these famous words in a beautiful prayer. Speaking of God, he wrote:

You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. (St. Augustine of Hippo)

How true that is! Whenever we are away from God – whether it be the garden of temptation or the pigsty of repentance – there will be always be a stirring inside of us that calls us home – back to the Father who loves us and runs to us.

- Outside of Eden we always know there is something more than we can find in anything else.
- If we are willing to admit it, we will agree that only God satisfies.
- And we will have to agree with the younger son. We now must go home.

That's the moment when we begin to understand what Jesus did for us. That's the moment the cross comes into view. Like a trip down I-70, we see the cross and we know we are almost home.

I don't know if Mary in our Gospel reading for today ever heard Jesus talk about the cross. I suspect she did, because in the days leading up to our text Jesus had talked openly about it.

- Even if she had not heard it, Mary had already witnessed what Jesus could do for her.
- John 11 – the chapter prior to today's text – is the story of Lazarus.
  - Not the Lazarus the department store, but Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha who died and was resurrected by Jesus.
  - Mary got her brother back!
  - She knew what Jesus had done for her.

The cross is for us what Lazarus was for Mary.

The cross is the picture of Jesus did for us. Look at it hanging over my head! When we see the cross – and come to understand what it means – we are drawn to it. We know we are on our way home.

- The story of Mary in today's gospel teaches us what happens within and around us once we understand what Jesus has done.
- There are three points.

## **#1: WHEN WE KNOW WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR US, EVERYTHING ELSE LOSES ITS VALUE**

The last event in the life of Jesus before what we know as Holy Week was this quiet dinner with His friends Mary, Martha and the resurrected Lazarus.

- Imagine that dinner conversation!

Mary watched her brother – once dead – talk with the One who had resurrected him. She was so moved by what she saw, she did the key event of the story:

Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. (John 12:3)

“Nard” is an oil derived from the root and spike of the nard plant. It would have been imported from as far east as India, making it very expensive and very valuable.

- Our text calls it a “pint” but the Greek word is “liter.”
- That was an extraordinarily extravagant amount.
- In this amazing act of faith, Mary takes the most valuable thing she has and dumps it out on the feet Jesus.
- Mary had her brother back! That liter of perfume couldn't compare with what Jesus had given her.

When we know what Jesus has done for us, everything we have is brought to the feet of Jesus. Our most valuable possessions pale in comparison to what Jesus has done.

That's the same experience the Apostle Paul was describing when he wrote my favorite passage of Scripture. Paul had quite a resume, but once he encountered Jesus and realized what Jesus had done for him, his view of his accomplishments changed. So he writes:

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage ... (Philippians 4:8)

## **#2: WHEN WE KNOW WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR US, WE PUT OURSELVES AT HIS FEET**

Look again at verse 3:

Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. (John 12:3)

This is kind-of church-y talk, and I hate to do that, but please give me a little leeway.

When Mary came to the feet of Jesus, she took the place of a slave. The feet were the position of humility. It is not the place of honor.

- If you think you are an equal to Jesus, you want to sit near His head – on the same level.
- But when you know what Jesus has done, you realize that you are not His equal. You don't belong at His head. You belong at his feet.

In church-y terms we often talk about laying down all our sins and burdens at the feet of Jesus. In so doing, we communicate that Jesus is Lord of all.

It is a common Scriptural image. You will read it many times. In fact, Mary herself had been in this position before – right before Jesus resurrected her brother:

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (John 11:32)

You know, part of the journey home is the realization that we can't do what Jesus has done for us. When the prodigal son came home in last week's story, the speech he wanted to give to his dad was this:

I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants. (Luke 15:18-19)

I am servant. My place is at your feet. In one of their many songs Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote:

Sitting at the feet of Jesus  
Where can mortals be more blest  
There I lay my sins and sorrows  
And there we find sweet rest

### **#3: WHEN WE KNOW WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR US, OTHERS MAY NOT UNDERSTAND WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO**

Look at verse 4:

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected...  
(John 12:4)

Of course, Mary was misunderstood and criticized; but that is what usually happens when somebody gives his or her best to the Lord.

It was Judas who started the criticism, and, sad to say, the other disciples took it up. They did not know that Judas had other motives.

- They didn't know Judas was a thief or that he would one day betray Jesus.
- They didn't know that Judas had no interest in the cross. He wanted a revolution and nothing else would do.

But no matter what people may say, we need to keep the cross in view. Only the cross. Always the cross.

The Apostle Paul wrote it like this ...

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

### **APPLICATION**

Every time I see that steeple on Weaver Chapel, I get the feeling that I am almost home.

- There are still some miles to go. There is still traffic to contend with. There are still other drivers who will do irritating things.
- There may be a broken-down car or two, or a police officer parked in the median.
- There are plenty of distractions to sidetrack me from my destination, but still ... when I see the cross, I know that I have almost arrived at my destination.

Where are you in your journey of faith? Are you heading home? Can you still see the cross?

Amen.