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Commits to Loving & Caring Relationships
John 12:1-8, John 15:12-13
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This is week #5 of our series “Becoming a Healthy Disciple” and **our theme is a healthy disciple commits to loving and caring relationships. A healthy disciple prioritizes genuine love for one another in the home, workplace, church, and community.** Two scriptures that illustrate this genuine and generous love are *John 12:1-8* and *John 15:12-13*.

“Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of **Lazarus**, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. **Martha** served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. **Mary** took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?’ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.’”

If you want a clue about how significant this event was to the author of the fourth gospel, how about this in *John 11:2*, before Lazarus has been raised from the dead and before Mary has anointed Jesus. “Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair.” As we read through *John’s Gospel*, we don’t even know what John’s referring to because it hasn’t happened yet! *John 11:5* tells us that Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus and we know they loved him too.

What Mary does in John 12 is demonstrate extravagant love and care for Jesus in an impressive act of gratitude and worship. What Mary did in breaking open her alabaster jar was to lavishly anoint Jesus before his burial and to acknowledge him as the Messiah who would give his life for everyone. Her prophetic act revealed that Jesus’ death was an act of lavish love and generous giving, which calls for lavish love and generous giving in return. She gave very unselfconsciously. I’m guessing there were more than a couple people present who were a little uncomfortable witnessing what Mary was doing. A respectable woman in Palestine would never do such a thing. But Mary cared more about expressing her love for Jesus than for what people thought about her. She derived great joy from what she did, and it’s been told and remembered ever since. How sad it is when we have the opportunity to express love and care and we fail to do so, and then we have to live with our regret or remorse later on.

The value of the perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus was the equivalent of a year’s wages! Mary’s love expresses itself in great generosity. Judas tries to cloak his lack of love and caring in the well-worn garment of self-righteousness, as if he was supremely concerned for the poor. Jesus’ rebuke of Judas makes it clear that his objection didn’t come from a pure heart or

genuine compassion for the poor. When Jesus says “you always have the poor with you,” that’s not an excuse to ignore the poor or to justify poverty. Jesus makes that clear in a Mark’s parallel story by saying (*Mark 14:7*), “You can show kindness to them (the poor) whenever you wish.” The question that leads to is do we show kindness to them? What do we do with the alabaster jar in our possession? The Lord has a unique role for each of us to play. We all have our own alabaster jar, and we decide what we’ll do with it whether we keep it on a shelf for ourselves, or whether we will break it out and break open and share what’s inside.

Vance Havner wrote, “God uses broken things: broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume.” If we have committed ourselves to Christ, then like Mary we’ll hold nothing back in our devotion to him no matter what the cost or what other people think. As we show and share the life of Jesus through our lives, as cracked and banged up and weak as they may be, as we share each other’s joys and sorrows, Christ will be seen and God’s love and care will be displayed among us.

In *John 15:12-13*, **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”** Jesus did exactly that—he laid down his life for his disciples and for everyone. The kind of love Jesus is talking about is agape—unconditional love that seeks the highest good of the other. Each of us decides our response to Christ’s sacrificial love for us and whether we’ll share God’s love with others. Can you imagine what the world would be like if Christians were truly known for our love? What if all our relationships were motivated by the kind of love that Jesus has shown for us? Gary Chapman in his best-selling book *The Five Love Languages* suggests that each of us has a preferred language for receiving love from others. We all need to give and receive love in different ways: through words of affirmation; quality time; acts of service; physical touch; and gifts. Sharing love in all five ways is fitting and important, but we all have one or two that speak more to us. Expressing a commitment to loving and caring relationships begins with knowing the love language that is most important to each of our key relationships.

Last weekend Jill and I attended MissionWorks, a regional American Baptist conference about Missions. This year the theme involved hospitality and showing genuine love for those who need it most. On Saturday morning, the speaker was a woman from Myanmar, which is east of Bangladesh and India and north of Thailand and Laos. She shared the painful and difficult story of the struggle of her Christian family to survive in Myanmar. Her father and grandfather were Baptist pastors. Many people in her village disappeared. Her father built a hole in the ground in which the family could hide when the soldiers came. Her brother, who was autistic and not verbal, couldn’t answer the soldiers’ questions so was beaten and died of his wounds. She and her husband had three children and they began caring for a fourth who had been orphaned. She is part of the Karin people and the Karin soldiers, unpaid volunteers, helped guide them through the jungle and hills to the relative safety of a refugee camp in Thailand. In the jungle they could at least forage for food, but they weren’t allowed to do that in the refugee camp. They were very grateful to the United Nations and local people for food to keep them

alive. There was no meat, fish or vegetables. They didn't have the money to pay for all the documentation to go to Australia. To shorten a longer story, they finally completed all the paperwork and after years of praying they were allowed to come to the United States, but they wouldn't let them take the orphaned boy who had become part of their family. They refused to leave the boy alone in a refugee camp and the whole family stayed in the refugee camp **for two more years** until they received permission to bring the orphaned boy with them as well. Talk about a commitment to loving and caring relationships. She didn't pick a state to live in, but when they were sent to Massachusetts she was ecstatic because her grandmother had told her the story of how Adoniram Judson had come from Massachusetts to Burma and brought the Gospel. She is now a lay leader at the First Baptist Church in Worcester.

I'm going to close with another example that demonstrates a commitment to loving, caring relationships and a spirit of generous giving. A church member shared a story with me that Julie Morgan posted on Facebook this past Tuesday.

"25 years ago we lived in Battle Creek, MI. We were young and money was tight but every pay day, Rich would pick up *Steve's Pizza* for dinner. I can't possibly describe how delicious this pizza is, but several moves and all these years later, it is still the gold standard and we've never found a better pizza yet. Rich has frequently critiqued other pizza as "good but, it's no *Steve's*. Rich and I recently planned a weekend getaway to Michigan to celebrate my birthday. We talked about seeing the leaves and the lakeshore, but that was secondary to our planned visit to *Steve's*.

Instead, I took Rich to the ER where he landed in ICU for five days, and where we learned the news that his valiant cancer battle was coming to an end. Rich is home under hospice care, and we are enjoying every minute reminiscing and visiting with family and friends. Unbeknownst to us, my dad contacted *Steve's Pizza* and spoke to Dalton, a manager there. He told Dalton a little bit about our situation and asked if the shop might send a friendly text or card to us.

Without hesitation Dalton asked what kind of pizza we wanted, and told my father he would bring it to us (by the way, *Steve's* doesn't deliver). My dad clarified that we were in Indianapolis, at least three and a half hours away from Battle Creek. Dalton said he understood that, and would leave after he closed the store. And so, while Rich and I slept, at 2:30 AM, Dalton rolled into our driveway, left the car running and delivered two extra special pizzas to my waiting family. He told them we were in his prayers, and offered to help in any way he could. My dad offered to put him up in a hotel, but he refused and immediately left for the return trip home because he had to work the next day.

I am beyond overwhelmed and humbled by this act of genuine kindness. Dalton brought our family so much joy—and the best pizza in the world—at a really difficult time. While "thank you" hardly seems adequate, from the bottom of my heart, thank you, Dalton from *Steve's Pizza* in Battle Creek, MI for making your epic middle of the night pizza delivery!"

What a lovely act of generosity and caring for Dalton to drive 3 ½ hours each way through the night to deliver two pizzas to a terminally ill man and his family. What a wonderful thank you message from Julie Morgan that she shared not just with Dalton, but with the world. I'm guessing the phone at *Steve's Pizza* in Battle Creek has been ringing constantly this weekend too. Doing good I suspect will lead to even better business.

Is there someone you could write to express gratitude and thanks to today? Doreen Mayer has 200 note cards for Small Group Leaders to take back to their small groups this week so people can be encouraged to compose a hand written note of gratitude to someone who modeled or brought a commitment to loving and caring relationships to life for you. Or if you just want to stop by the church library, which is the first room on the right as soon as you leave the sanctuary, you can pick up a note card from the basket on the table. If you want to write a note at home and mail it that's fine. Or, you can write it out while you're here and we'll mail it on Monday.

One of the shows that will be at The Cape Playhouse in Dennis next summer is *A Chorus Line*, which has some great songs in it. One of them is *What I Did for Love* by Josh Groban. It says in part,

"Gone
Love is never gone
As we travel on
Love's what we'll remember
Won't forget, can't regret
What I did for love."

I'm sure that Mary didn't regret for a moment what she did for love for Jesus. I led a service for Eileen Sprague here yesterday, and from what her children and grandchildren shared, it's true that love is never gone, and as we travel on, love's what we'll remember. We all leave a mark on the lives that touch our own—let it be a touch of love.

Prayer: Precious Lord, you have modeled extravagant love for us, and those who knew you and loved you in return are role models for us today. May our lives embody some of those same characteristics so we too can be catalysts for extravagant love in our relationships within our family, church, circle of friends, community, school, and workplace.

Blessing: "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins." *1 Peter 4:8*

John 13:34-35, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Questions for Discussion or Reflection:

1. Using your imagination, picture yourself in the home of Lazarus (*John 12:1*); how do you think you might feel or react if you were at a dinner party and a woman began doing what Mary did to Jesus (*verse 3*)?
2. How would you describe what Mary did? What do you think motivated her?
3. The value of the perfume Mary used to anoint Jesus was the equivalent of a year's wages; why do you think she gave so lovingly and extravagantly to Jesus?
4. Can you think of an example of extravagant generosity that you've been the beneficiary of; if so, how did it make you feel? If you've been able to bless someone else in a generous way—why did you do it? How did it make you feel?
5. What does Judas's response reveal about him?
6. How does Jesus interpret what Mary has done? What can we learn from Mary's example of love and caring for Jesus? Of Jesus love and care for us?