

**“Embracing Love”**  
**Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore**

**John 12:1-8**                      **March 14, 2010**  
**San Dimas Community Church, UCC**

We’re moving closer to Holy Week and all that that means to us as people who look to Jesus as God’s revelation to this world. The text for today is perhaps one of the last evenings Jesus’ spends with his closest of friends. They were like family to him. We find him in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who just a chapter earlier, Jesus has raised from the dead.

The text simply states that “Martha served.” There’s no discussion of which sister is doing the more noble thing as happens in other gospels. Martha is extending the highly honored hospitality of ancient Palestine and Mary is being attentive to Jesus in her own way. Perhaps these closest of friends know that Jesus is wearied from his preaching and needs some tender-loving care. Perhaps they intuit that the days to come will not be so kind to their dear friend and rabbi. Or perhaps these are the actions of people whose hearts simply overflow with gratitude because of what Jesus has meant to them. It’s a beautiful depiction of the support of friends in a time of need. And Jesus’ part in this story shows us that he knows that there’s a time and a place to let others care for us. He doesn’t have to be the strong one all the time. He honors the gifts of others by letting them give those gifts to him. He knows that Mary needs to do this, and he lets her.

But there’s always the choir of critics: in this story, it is Judas, who must butt in and criticize what’s going on, even if it is an act of kindness. Judas protests: Why did Mary waste this ointment (worth the equivalent of 20 to 30 thousand dollars) on Jesus’ feet? Didn’t she listen to Jesus preach about taking care of the poor and needy? If she’d really been paying attention, she would have sold this ointment and fed a lot of hungry people. Sounds noble enough. Sounds like Judas really cares about people who are hungry. But the story tells us that Judas has his own motives and they’re not noble at all. In fact, they are self-serving. Jesus sees right through Judas and what he sees is a heart that is stone-cold. And he calls Judas on it! Jesus tells Judas to let Mary be.

This scripture offers us important lessons as we move toward Holy Week. The first lesson is to look into the heart and discern the true motives. It may mean looking in our hearts or it may mean looking deep into the hearts of others. One way to test motives is to see if the words match the actions. Jesus knew Judas’ motives because, in spite of his noble words of feeding the poor, Judas stole money from the common purse to use for his own purposes. Lent provides us a time to examine our hearts to see if what we say matches what we do. Do we walk the talk?

Another important lesson is that sometimes we need to let others take care of us. To allow someone to figuratively “wash our feet” is humbling. This is hard for most of

us to do. It strikes at our core of wanting to be independent. But there comes a time when to refuse the care of someone who loves us is just another form of pride. We need each other. God made us to need each other. There's nothing weak about knowing that relationships are mutual and that sometimes we are on the receiving end (other times we're on the giving end). The ability to allow someone to care for us is a sign of intimacy. Jesus allowed this kind of intimacy while visiting Mary, Martha, and Lazarus that day.

Another lesson is what we're to do with those choir of critics who most of the time are the voices in our own heads, the voice of Judas, who always has a word to say, and that word is usually "should." "You should be doing more. You should be giving more. You should be better." Jesus silences the "shoulds."

What happened that day is so important that all four gospel writers needed to write about it. And in all four descriptions of this story, what we see is Mary overcome with gratitude because of Jesus' embracing love. She can't contain or control her emotions because Jesus has touched her and changed her life forever. She's a new woman! And no one, not even Judas, is going to take that away from her.

I'd like to return to Martha, who in this gospel doesn't get much attention and in the other gospels gets criticized. In John's telling of this story, Martha served without judgement. We need Marthas in our world to be attentive to the needs of others and to offer through their acts of care and kindness God's embracing love to the world. Marthas allow themselves to be spent for something or someone greater than themselves. Next week is the culmination of our OGHS invitation to be Marthas in our world. I'd like to play a video that shows just what we have done and hope to continue to do through our actions like those of Martha. [Show video.]

As we are both Mary and Martha, we receive and we give the embracing love of God. And we do so with joy because our hearts cannot be contained. Our hearts are overflowing. God has done great things for us; so we want all the world to know and to experience the embracing, extravagant love of the Holy One throughout all God's creation. May this be our mission in the week to come.