

ASBURY CIRCUIT RIDER

Extravagance

There is a story found in the Gospels that warrants a double-take just as it surely did when it first happened. This story, as told by the writer of the Gospel of John, sets the scene at the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany. Jesus and His followers are visiting and once again Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. But this time Mary is not so much



listening as showing her love for Jesus.

This is a provocative story of intimacy and extravagant love. Mary breaks open a \$30K container of perfumed oil to rub on the feet of Jesus. And she lets her hair down to use it to wipe His feet. Judas is the only one willing to speak out and the writer notes that his intentions were for his own benefit. Perhaps Judas said what the others were thinking. I can imagine Peter blushing and heading into the kitchen. I can imagine a room full of men and women wondering just what was going on.

This story is rich with intrigue. There are several trajectories, or stories within stories that we can explore. First, we can safely speculate that this perfume may have been all that Mary owned. This is more likely than the scenario that there was enough household wealth that this jar was simply “disposable” income.

Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.

John 12:3 GNT

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Spilled

Don't you imagine that God must roll His eyes at a lot of our requests? We think that we need the latest fashion, that we need to impress others, that we want our party to be the best ever. I suspect that most of us think that God not only holds us to a tight budget, but it is a rather meager one at that. “Just the essentials” we im-

agine God saying, “You don't need anything except My approval.”



And so when we pray for something extravagant, we can't help but feel a bit guilty. Didn't Jesus live on the margins? Wasn't Jesus homeless and jobless? Didn't Jesus say once that the Son of Man has no place to lay His head? How can I ask for something that I can get by without if I serve a God of little in the way of comfort?

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Special points of interest:

Asbury Café is Open!

Asbury Café is opened for lunch on Fridays from 10:00am-2:00pm outside the Worship Center on the main floor.



These selections will also be available on Sunday mornings before and after worship.



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Spilled ...cont. from Page 1

It's true. We serve a God who chose to live among people. Not the rich and powerful, but among people living on the margins. The poor. The outcasts. The sick and the lame. We serve a God who did not use divine power for His own comfort and purpose. Isn't it hard to imagine that God doesn't expect the same sacrifices out of us?

Doesn't God expect each one of us to sell everything, give the money to the poor and follow Him? And if this is true, what is the good news all about? No wonder so many people decide to sleep in on Sunday mornings rather than go to church. Who wants to be made to feel guilty that they either have, or want, a house, a job, a car, a family and money to take a vacation every year? No one who has these things.

There was a wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine had given out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They are out of wine."

John 2:1-3 GNT

So I imagine that one of the best arguments that people have with themselves, perhaps without actually voicing the words, is why get involved in church if it means that I have to put myself and my family's need behind the needs of others? For a lot of young people just setting out into the world with great expectations of finally having some extra money in their pocket for something they always wanted, even if they grew up in a church family, there is an overwhelming temptation to wait to get involved with church until sometime later. "Let me enjoy life for a while" I hear them saying. "I'll come back to church after my career gets off the ground."

I remember the first time my daughter, Nicole, came to hear me preach while I was serving at Second Grace in Detroit. It was my first sermon there and I shared some of my testimony. How I had come to realize that I needed to give up my career in the computer industry and devote my life entirely to Christ as a pastor. "It's not fair," Nicole said to me after worship. "You had your career. You had your success. And then you had

your conversion. I want to have a career too."

I wasn't sure what to say. It was clear that my sermon touched a nerve. It sounded like my daughter thought that my sermon was tailor-made to her. But I didn't know that she would be there when I completed my notes that week. I was simply sharing my story. Not her story. I didn't ask anyone to

They filled them to the brim, and then he told them, "Now draw some water out and take it to the man in charge of the feast." They took him the water, which now had turned into wine.

John 2:7-9 GNT

give up their career to follow Jesus. I said to her what I truly believe and I will say to anyone "waiting" to get involved in a church. "That's ok. You can wait as long as you want to have the joy that I feel now. No one is rushing you."

In the Gospel of John, chapter 2, we read about a time when Jesus, His mother and His followers attended a wedding in Cana. When we think about Jesus and all of the healing and feeding miracles, His teaching, His turning over tables at the Temple, we might not catch the idea that Jesus went to parties. That Jesus attended wedding receptions. In Cana, that day, Jesus attended a wedding reception where the budget wasn't enough. Midway through the evening the unthinkable happened. They ran out of wine.

Hospitality at that time was considered mandatory. If you had guests you fed them. If you threw a party you made sure you had enough. To fail to do what expected was to bring shame to your family and damage to your credibility. And since families were not just centers of consumption but centers

Extravagance... cont. from page 1

More likely, this perfume was Mary's pension plan that was to be sold if she found herself without others to take care of her. Perhaps it was her dowry given to her by her father in the hope of a future marriage. Mary was giving all that she had to offer Jesus with reckless abandonment rather than calculated sacrifice.

Judas is the disciple who fails Jesus. Even in this story we can read between the lines and conclude that Judas is the one most likely to betray Jesus. Our Book Club this past Wednesday spent time debating the character of Ju-

das. The writer of the book we are studying portrayed Judas as a sort of "rotten to the core" thief who stole from the common purse because that is the sort of person Judas was. And Judas had something negative to say about Mary's act because he was showing us who he is. I take exception to this conclusion.

Judas, like the rest of us, was created in the image of God. Judas, like many of us, claimed to follow Jesus. And Jesus chose Judas to be one of His disciples.

Extravagance...cont. from page 2

Did Jesus choose Judas because He knew that this was the man who would turn Him over to authorities and fulfill scripture? There was a lot of agreement within our discussion that scripture insists that Judas had to betray Jesus. That this was the purpose and destiny of Judas.

But did Judas still have a choice? Did Judas have freewill? After all, Judas likely chose to justify to himself that taking money from the common purse was an acceptable reward for his oversight of the funds. It's likely that Judas felt that he was entitled to a fair share of the purse.

One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot—the one who was going to betray him—said, —why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins, and the money given to the poor?"

John 12:4-5 GNT

Perhaps it started with a few pennies so he could get his sandals repaired. But a new pair is only a little bit more and after all, they walk everywhere.

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In Our Prayers

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Curtis Young | Christopher Lewis |
| Rachel Bastine | Sarah Tanner |
| Norma Buzzard | Elizabeth Wright |
| Virginia Bigger | Judy Tanner |
| Barbara McIvor | Mary Lyons |
| Jonathon Misner | Richard Oram |
| Nancy Auger | Merle Supernaw |
| Austin & Mary Suffle | |
| Shirley Craig | |

FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES WHO ARE HOMEBOUND OR IN NURSING CARE

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| Sharon George | Mary Russell |
| Elaine Lamoreaux | Mary Nations |

Spilled...cont. from page 2

Of production—in other words, every family was also a family business—bringing shame to your family also brought a not-so-good reputation to your family business. Who is going to buy olives from a business that didn't plan ahead? And what better evidence of reliability than a wedding reception that is off the hook.

Jesus' mother was tuned into the pending shortage and went to her son to let Him know. Mary asked Jesus in the most subtle way that mother's know how to ask without really asking and Jesus responded the way a good Son responds. He did what His mother expected. Jesus took care of the problem.

This miracle that Jesus performed in Cana is the first of seven miracles that demonstrate that Jesus had power that was beyond human power. And Jesus made it clear that He did only that which His Father God gave Him to do. And what was on God's agenda?

According to John's Gospel, God empowered Jesus to make wine out of water to save a party. As John's Gospel continues, Jesus then heals the son of an official without even going to his house. Jesus then heals a man who had been lame for 38 years. And Cana

won't be the last party Jesus will save — He will feed over 5,000 people without a caterer and with a feast that seems to come out of nowhere. Later Jesus will walk on water, heal a man blind since birth and raise Lazarus from the dead.

Tell me, are these the miracles of a God of mediocrity? Is this a God who expects us to just get by? Do these miracles sound to you like Jesus Christ wants us just be happy with whatever comes our way no matter how little we have?

Time after time, we see God's generosity come through in such abundance that it defies logic.

God's nature is abundance. We see this in nature. We see God's abundance in times of need. We see God's abundance when we ask and are obedient. True, we don't get everything we pray for. True, we sometimes run out, come up short, miss a payment and go without something that we really need. But time after time, we see God's generosity come through in such abundance that it defies logic. We see miracles.

And joy is the most abundant of all when we are faithful. If your Sunday mornings are reserved for sleeping in or just hanging out at home. Take your time. Enjoy yourself. And when you are tired of feeling like you're missing something that you can't live without, come join us for worship. Find the abundant joy that does not come when you put anything else ahead of serving God. See you in church.

Pastor Tommy



Prayer is at the heart of our beliefs

**Asbury Worship Series
Insight
Believing is Seeing**

Stories of people's sight being restored by Jesus are found throughout the Gospels. Blindness is both a lack of physical sight and a lack of divinely inspired insight. We are spiritually blind if we see the world strictly from a human perspective. Divine sight sees

much more. Divine sight is like X-ray vision that can see through hurt and struggle. Divine sight sees healing while human sight sees only brokenness. A person can be physically blind but have insight. A person can have 20/20 vision and have no insight.

Our new worship series, *Insight*, begins appropriately on the day we Christians call "Epiphany" Sunday (January 6). While most

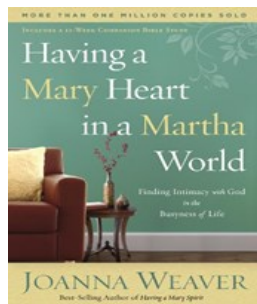
of our manger scenes include the astrologers from the East, commonly called the Wise-man, the reality is that they likely arrived afterwards.



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Book Club News

Do you consider yourself a busy person? Are your days generally filled with things to do? Are there some days where



you feel like you are falling further behind? These are questions that according to the author of our next book could be proceeded with "You may be a Martha if..." Perhaps you not a Martha-type. Instead of busyness

that never ends you take time to "smell the roses" and talk to strangers and manage to be the target of rolling eyes and harsh comments about not doing your share of the chores. Well, "You might be a Mary if..."

On Wednesday, October 31, we begin our next book titled *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World*. Mary and Martha are named in the Gospels in three places: Luke

10:38-42, John 11:1-44, and John 12:1-11. Scholars suspect that Jesus frequently stayed with the two sisters and their brother Lazarus, but these are the three stories of Jesus visiting them that we find in scripture. One thing is clear in terms of their type-casting, Mary is not Martha and Martha is not Mary. They are two very different people who both want to know and serve Jesus Christ.

This study offers an invitation for everyone of us who feels like we just aren't godly enough... or loving enough... or that we just aren't doing enough. Our lives today really are not all that different from that of Mary and Martha in the New Testament. Like Mary, don't you also long to sit at the Lord's feet... but the daily demands of a busy world just won't leave you alone? Like Martha, don't you love Jesus and really want to serve Him... yet don't you often struggle with weariness, resentment, and feelings of inadequacy?

Just like the story told by Luke, Jesus comes right into the midst of your busy Mary/Martha life and extends the same

invitation He issued long ago to the two sisters of Bethany. Tenderly He invites you to choose "the better part" of life. A joyful life of "living-room" intimacy with Him. An intimacy that flows naturally into serving Him. Come learn how can you make that choice. In this study we will learn how all of us, Marys and Marthas alike, can draw closer to Jesus Christ, deepening our devotion, strengthening our service, and doing both with less stress and greater joy.

Author Joanna Weaver' book has sold over a million copies and her books and Bible studies have been used by hundreds of churches, life groups and individuals. Our time with Joanna's book will be guided using a ten week study guide that she provides along with short video clips from her companion DVD. Joanna is the mother of three children and the wife of a pastor in Montana so she has plenty of experience in the church environment. While this book is written from a woman's perspective the story and lessons are equally applicable to all gender identities.

We encourage you to come to our Wednesday gatherings. Our small group hopes to widen our circle and so we hope that you will join in on our discussion. We meet each Wednesday at Noon. Come join us for a light lunch, fellowship and discussion. Our food selections have been fantastic and we always have plenty to share. And we are always on the lookout for our next book, video lesson or topic. Your participation and suggestions are greatly appreciated.

Pastor Tommy

* Weaver, Joanna. *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life*. CO: Crown Publishing Group, 2000.

Leadership in Worship & Service

Welcome Team Tony, Mirium,
Ushers Anthony, Jim
Production Team Mark
Children Mirium & Emily
Worship Leaders Cyndi
Café Christine & Norma

Jim Craig Leadership Chair
Connie Portillo Office Secretary
Kevin Croom Farm to Table
Israel Unger Business Operations

Asbury Café

Plan to meet outside the sanctuary each Sunday before worship for coffee, tea, snacks, conversation and so on. The music will start when it is time to wrap up and head in for worship.

Asbury Staff

Rev. Dr. Tommy McDoniel Pastor
Mark Vorenkamp Children & Youth
Sylvia Pittman Worship Arts

Asbury Worship Series ... Insight...Believing is Seeing.. Cont. from page 4

So we set aside a separate day of recognition to celebrate, not so much their arrival, as their departure. It is a miracle that these individuals travelled to find the newborn King. But the miracle began with the insight that they received to know to make the trip. We call this an "epiphany" or divine insight.

Beyond the obvious, these astrologers were not Jewish. In biblical terms we know them as Gentiles. That's the biblical term used for those of us who are likewise not Jewish. We believe in the same God found in our Old Testament who was initially known as the God of what became to be the people of the Exodus and are known as the "Jews". But this God is also the God of Abraham who is claimed by the people of Islam

to be Allah — the God they worship.

What sets us apart as Christians is the epiphany that these astrologers were given that led to their discovery. That this newborn "King of the Jews" was also God who chose to be born human, live as human, die by execution at the hands of the powerful, only to rise from the dead. Human power cannot reduce divine power. Human insight cannot see that which divine insight can see. An epiphany is only a glimpse, but an epiphany can be life changing and affect the world in substantial ways.

By some estimates there are 285 Million people in the world who are visually impaired. Persons who are visually impaired are unable to see better than 20/40 even with corrective lenses. Approximately 39 Million persons are considered blind. According to the CDC, 3%

we receive the gift of faith, of belief, we are also given a dose of divine insight. We are able to "see" that God lived among people. That Jesus Christ is also God. This gift of sight, like the epiphany given to the astrologers from the East, is the beginning of our journey to the manger. Our trip to the heart of God. The Bible becomes our corrective lenses. We are still mostly blind spiritually, but we as we grow in our faith we gain more divine insight each day.

During our journey together that begins on Epiphany Sunday, we will consider how doubt and faith are friends, how doubting God is part of our journey. Without doubt there is no need for faith. And sometimes "just believe" is simply not enough. I'm thinking that we ought to spend a little bit of time on why I don't like "church" people. This will take some explanation so stand by. Which comes first, faith or doing? This "chicken and egg" question is a great one for understanding divine insight.

I hope that you will join us each Sunday to talk more about gaining insight. The trip to the manger is filled with amazement and awe. Come and see what God has done for yourself.

Pastor Tommy

- Coming up this week -

- Jan 28 Mon 6pm Worship Design
- Jan 29 Tues 10am-2pm Water Distribution
- Jan 30 Wed 12Noon Pastor Book Club
6pm Beginners Bible Study
- Jan 31 Thu 6pm Worship Band Practice
- Feb 1 Fri 10am-2pm Asbury Cafe Open
6pm Asbury Youth Group
- Feb 3 SUNDAY
9:30am Café Opens
10:30am New Beginnings
Contemporary Worship

Last Week for Worship:
Attendance 50 Offering \$ 2,661


"One thing I do know; I was blind, and now I see."

John 9:25 (GNT)

of people living in the U.S. are visually impaired. The CDC doesn't offer estimates of the percentage of people who are spiritually blind, but I'm guessing that we are all visually impaired, spiritually. We all lack divine insight to various degrees.

The tag line for our worship series is *Believing is Seeing*. When

SAVE THESE DATES ...



MAGIC
THE GATHERING

AS EDUCATION

A three-part class teaching Math, Strategic Planning, and Teamwork Strategies through learning Magic: The Gathering.

All participants will receive two "welcome decks" that will be used for the class and can be kept after.

Thurs Jan 24, 31, Feb 7 - 4:30-6:00PM
FREE
Participants 8 to 18 are welcome

ASBURY CHURCH
1653 DAVISON RD
FLINT, MI 48506



Breakthrough Concert & Celebration

Pastor Nick Hill, a beloved friend of Asbury, is releasing his 2nd CD - Breakthrough. Asbury Empowerment Arts Center will host a concert celebration on Friday, Feb 1 at 7:00 PM.

Call the Asbury Office (235-0016) to reserve your tickets!!

Asbury Farm to Table



While turning blight into beautiful and productive landscape is good on its own, transforming a food desert into abundance is life giving. But Asbury wants to make sure that produce is available on the tables of our residents. Our culinary arts and nutritional education programs offer residents the know how just as our farms offers nature's bounty. In addition, the Asbury Café is a culinary experience accessible to our neighbors and anyone with an appetite. Our "pay what you can" approach means that no one is turned away. Those who can help either on the farm or in the café are offered special MyFlintStones tokens that can be used either in the Asbury Café or in exchange for produce to prepare at home.

We proudly accept MyFlintStones

The Asbury Café is open Fridays 10am to 2pm & Sundays 10 am to 12 Noon

ASBURY CAFÉ MENU

Open Fridays 10am to 2pm

Pay what you can

DELI SUBS

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus choice of ham, turkey or beef

STIR FRY

Local grown garden vegetables sautéed with love and herbs

GARDEN SALAD

Local grown greens & vegetables. Ham, turkey or beef upon request

WRAPS

Lettuce, onions, tomato plus choice of ham, turkey or beef

MUFFINS

Chef Kevin's special recipe with fruit, love and other delights baked in.

SMOOTHIE

Assorted flavors of the day

COFFEE

Regular or decaf

Life Group Questions & Notes

Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair... One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot—the one who was going to betray him—said, “Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?”

John 12:3-5 GNT

NOTES FROM WORSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

1. This story offers a contrast of extravagant, unqualified love compared to qualified love based on reciprocity. What does qualified love look like? What does unqualified love look like?
2. Where does your relationship with Jesus fit on this continuum? How about your other relationships?
3. How can the members of your group help you this week and on-going to help you remove obstacles that stand in the way of your witness?

Welcome to the Asbury Community

1653 Davison Rd
Flint, MI 48506



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FLINT, MICHIGAN
PERMIT #151

Phone: 810-235-0016
Fax: 810-235-0016 (call first when faxing)
E-mail: FlintAsburyUMC@gmail.com

Neighborhood Connection



We envision a community in love with God, each other, and our neighbors evidenced by the transformation of ourselves and our neighborhood. We are a center for worship & spiritual growth, a center for connections and a center for health & wellness.

Our goal is a revitalized community where every resident can use their talents and passions for the common good, where children grow into citizens who contribute to building and maintaining a vibrant neighborhood, and all residents are able to enjoy safety, good health, a culture that fosters life long learning and satisfying lives.

We believe that such an ambitious goal can never be attained without God's grace and abundance and Christ calls each of us to be disciples willing to share our witness through words and acts.

Extravagance... cont. from page 3

A new coat last winter. And Judas was a big tipper and wasn't this good for Jesus' reputation that His followers take care of those who wait on them. There was also an overture of empathy for Judas during our discussions. Judas had to do what he did to fulfill God's plan. Judas was simply following his purpose.

I suspect that we are giving too much credit to Judas and to ourselves. Are we important? Yes. If we fail to do that which God created us for, does this thwart God's plan forcing God to go to Plan B? Perhaps. And it could be that we are not giving God enough credit.

The interrelationships of the universe are infinitely complex. Beyond anything that our most capable geniuses can fathom. Yet God knows Creation intimately and completely. And God seems to be patient beyond any patience that we could experience or even imagine. We are by nature not so patient. I believe that if Judas had chosen to assist Mary, rather than criticize her, this scene could have become a turnaround point for his life. And if so, someone else or somehow else, God's plan would still prevail even if a day, a year or more later. Most important, we may be missing the point.

In this story we are witnessing a comparison of extravagant, unqualified love compared to qualified, selfish love. And where on this continuum do we find our own story? What love are we capable of offering Christ? What decision do we make when tempted to hold onto our security and stick to our old ways, to do that which is expected, rather than give with reckless abandonment?

Where on this continuum do we find our own story?

Most of us are taught from childhood to conserve in proportion to our reward. We are taught how to trade whether it be marbles, toys, favors or insults. I offer you a used smoothie maker in exchange for a coffee pot. I help jump your car and you bring over fresh muffins. I call you lazy after you tell me that I'm not caring.

This is called reciprocity and we can easily conclude that God works the same way. If you love me, I will love you, as long as our relationship is beneficial to me. Our love and our sacrifices are qualified. And extravagance is intended for the wealthy who can offer expensive perfume out of their walking around money.

Even the word "extravagance" suggests recklessness. A lack of proper control. To be extravagant is to be reckless. Extravagance like the word radical is to do something unexpected and to risk ridicule and shame. Who needs that?

Yet, just as Jesus prophesied, for centuries this story about Mary's act of extravagant love is told and retold. Making wine out of water, the miracle of the wedding at Cana, is only a sample of what it means to love extravagantly. And this is the love that God has shown Creation from the beginning and has promised to love us always.

How much more love can a person show than to lay down their life for another? How much more extravagant than to give much more than expected. Early in John's Gospel we read how God love the world so much that Jesus was given as a gift in order to save us from self-destruction. This is extravagant love. And Mary was blessed that God had revealed to her the identity of Jesus and she responded with the gratitude of a person whose life had been saved.

May God grant us with the humility to do likewise. This is the 3rd week of our worship series, Insight. As we continue to work through the Gospel of John my hope for you is that God will expand your insight, revealing the path that lies before you that will lead you to extravagant love.

Pastor Tommy