



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

Aug 4, 2019

"At His Feet: Mary of Bethany"

Grit and Grace Sermon Series - Jenny Sung

Good morning, my name is Jenny Sung and I serve on staff as executive coordinator and lay pastor. The song we just listened to, "Nothing Else," draws us deeper into worship and captures the heart of the person we study today. The song says, "More than anything that You can do, I just want You. Nothing else, nothing else but Jesus." There are many things that can take the place of Jesus in our lives, when we are running our own agenda, when our hearts are closed to Him, or when we are distracted or anxious. This song, "Nothing Else," brings us back to understanding that at the very core, at the heart of it all, a real and close relationship with our Creator is what matters most.

Our person of focus today, Mary of Bethany, understood this. More than anything else, she chose to sit at the feet of Jesus. Each time we see Mary; she makes the choice to draw closer to Jesus. If you look at the passages involving Mary of Bethany, we see not once, or twice, but three times we keep finding her back at one particular spot, and that is around the feet of Jesus. I wonder, what would compel

someone to keep coming back to Jesus in this manner?

A bit about Mary's background: Not to be confused with Mary the mother of Jesus, or Mary Magdalene, this Mary of Bethany is the sister of Martha and Lazarus. She lives in the town of Bethany, a suburb let's say, about a mile and a half east of Jerusalem. During His life on Earth, Jesus and the disciples stayed with this family when He was there, and they were the closest of friends. In fact, the gospel of John 11:5, says, "*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*" These guys are loved, wow, it's like there is an amazing relationship and closeness amongst them!

Have you ever visited close friends when on vacation, or when they come to visit? Isn't it amazing to be with them? It's like time hasn't even passed and there's a closeness, the bonds of friendship. Whenever we visited Chicago, my husband and I would stay with our college friends, Kevin and Cindy. Cindy was my best friend in college, my maid of honor at my wedding, and to this day she is close to my heart. Cindy and Kevin stayed with us on

their visits to Hawaii and we stayed at their place when we would go to Chicago. We would laugh and talk late into the night, sharing our hopes, our struggles, and we would do meals and play games together.

Well this family, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, they were beloved friends of Jesus. They hosted Jesus and the disciples when they were in Bethany. Many are familiar with the story of Lazarus, the guy who Jesus raised from the dead. For four days he's decomposing and then pop! Jesus brings him back. Pretty amazing set of siblings. Next week Pastor Tim will share about the other sibling, Martha, and her story within the context of Lazarus in the tomb and being raised to life.

But today we focus on Mary, a woman who chooses to live her life in close intimacy with her Lord and Savior. I want to build a picture of Mary through the lens of several stories. Just like when you keep fitting in puzzle pieces to reveal a larger picture, the more we learn about Mary, the more we see a larger picture of who this person is and how she lived her life. The first story sets the groundwork for that posture of Mary's heart.

We are in the book of Luke 10:38-42. Jesus and the disciples are at their house, and Mary is found at the feet of Jesus in the midst of preparations.

Luke 10:38-42 *New International Version (NIV)*
38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

When we look at these passages, we tend to gravitate toward a comparison of the two sisters, Martha vs. Mary. There are many sermons and books that address this passage of Martha "in the doing" and Mary "in the being." Let me say that both women are amazing in their faith and devotion to Jesus. This story is more than the comparison between a life of worship and the life of service.

Sure, we may gravitate naturally toward one or the other, depending on the way we're wired, or in the season in life. Both are good, both are legitimate.

There was nothing wrong about what Martha was doing, nothing wrong about taking care of preparations that need to be done. We know there are verses in the Bible warning against sloth and laziness and verses talking about the value of diligence and hard work. Verse 40 gives us a hint at what's going on- *it says that Martha was distracted and cumbered.* Jesus says she was anxious and upset. The Greek lexicon for that word "distracted" means, "to be drawn away from." Martha was drawn away from Jesus. When we get down to the core of it, it is the state of her heart.

Do you notice that often times, when we are distracted, feeling anxious and irritable, it is when we've drawn away from God? Maybe we have drawn away from time with Him, drawn away from listening for His voice, or drawn away from being in His Word. Maybe we find that we're snapping more at our spouse, children or friends, or we are easily offended, we're anxious and worry more? I am not saying that we don't feel anxious when things happen, like if you get pulled over by a cop, you're gonna feel anxious! No, what I'm saying is the way in which we react to things, or how we respond to people or situations, is directly linked to the posture of our hearts.

What is coming out of our hearts when we are drawing away from Jesus? When we are distracted and cumbered? Do we carry the burden of resentment? Do we hold onto jealousy, or blame or judgment? How about shame? Are you drawing away or towards Jesus these days?

It wasn't too long ago I confessed to a friend at lunch that I was recently irritated and upset after several working events. As I was cleaning up at the end of the event, I found myself irritated and critical, thinking people needed to "pull their weight." I felt upset and troubled, and I started down the path of, "Oh I'm doing so much more than what they're doing." I could just hear the thoughts inside my head, judging others as apathetic, or even lazy and inadequate. I knew there was something seriously wrong, and I had to pause, pray and reflect upon the state of my heart. I realized I was "drawn away" (perispaó) from Jesus. My posture was nowhere near the feet of Jesus. The focus was only on what I wanted, and myself and not on God.

There was nothing wrong in realizing things needed to be done, but in the process, I had allowed the sin of resentment and bitterness to creep in. At the core of it, I struggled with A BIG LIE that keeps surfacing in my life. It is a lie that pushes my buttons and affects the posture of my heart. This lie says that my worth and value comes from what I do in life.

From a young age, I was a people pleaser, and remember praise and attention for what I accomplished - so whether that was through good grades or good deeds, or success, my value and identity was built around how well I did. Thus the lie- that my identity and value in life is based on what I do, through works and the success of those works- drew me away from the feet of Jesus.

Many who are workaholics base their identity and value on what they do in their job or career, and a lot of us struggle out of this lie of measurement- that our worth is tied to what we do and the more we do, the more valuable we are. I basically believed and acted out of a salvation of works, not of grace. I still struggle with this, but over the years, I have grown to a greater understanding that God's love is a gift of grace, and my worth is independent of what I do. The Apostle Paul specifically says that we are saved by grace, not works in Ephesians chapter 2. He talks about God's love as a gift, not earned.

Ephesians 2:4-5

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

I love Tim Keller's description of two paradigms, two ways we view God and life. He uses the terms "religion" vs. the "gospel." Religion operates on the principle of, "I obey; therefore, I'm accepted and

now God owes me." The gospel operates on the principle of, "I'm accepted through the infinite sacrifice of Jesus Christ and sheer grace. Therefore, I obey and I owe him everything." Those are two absolutely different paradigms. First, "I obey; therefore, I'm accepted and God owes me." Second, "I'm accepted because of Jesus' infinite grace and sacrifice; therefore, I obey and I owe him everything."

That day, when I was distracted and far from the feet of Jesus, I succumbed to the lie that held others to this lie of measurement. I was not serving out of an understanding of God's love, grace and sacrifice. I was distracted and cumbered about many things. My heart was distant from God.

When we are honest enough to be real with ourselves, to God and others, when we ponder and sit before our Creator, and in real Christian community with one another, we understand it's not the WHAT that determines our worth- but a WHO. Not WHAT but WHO. JESUS IS WHO MATTERS, for it's in Him that we live and move and have our being. When we act from a solid foundation and identity in Jesus and what He says about us, it drives our purpose and will and behavior in all aspects of our lives.

It is at the feet of Jesus that we see what He sees, discover His peace, experience His hope, are moved to forgive and are filled by His love. Even when there is conviction, it's not a

condemnation but an assurance of God's love that leads to repentance.

The second story about Mary takes us to a time of great grief and sorrow in her life. We go to the book of John chapter 11, where Mary's brother, Lazarus, is so sick that he actually passes away. Pastor Tim will go into this story in more detail next week, but I want to focus on Mary's actions in this passage.

Starting in verse 28, Martha calls her sister Mary when Jesus arrives in Bethany. Now remember that Lazarus has been dead 4 days. Martha tells Mary, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. Because she got up so quickly, the rest of the people there follow her out. They thought she was going to the tomb. But she was going to Jesus. In verse 32, we read, *32 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."*

Verse 32 is when we see Mary at the feet of Jesus for the second time. But it's not listening at His feet at a dinner party, it's falling at His feet in pain, weeping and distraught. In front of her Lord, and in front of everyone there, she says, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. *It's* like she's crying out, "Where were you Jesus? Where were you when we needed you most? You are Lord- If you were here this horrible thing wouldn't have happened."

I find this to be an incredible verse – not just because of her faith in Jesus, but more so because she models what intimacy with God is all about. Mary gives us bigger picture of what it means to live a life of intimacy with God, and what it means to be in Christian community with one another.

You see, Mary could have been drawn away from Jesus in her darkest moments. Mary, in that time of great need, could have hid her pain from her Lord. If she felt that Jesus wasn't there for her, she could have run in the other direction. Or she could have hid her disappointment- just present one version of herself, the trusting, and good side to Jesus. Hide the doubt and the pain. But in her darkest moment she comes before Jesus with tears, with questions and anguish for what she thought Jesus could have prevented.

I think for many of us, we hide in our darkest moments of pain, from God and one another. If it doesn't make sense to us, we draw further away from God. If we feel weak, we hide our shame and draw further away from God and maybe from people. We don't want to show the ugly, the weakness. Maybe this is our fallen nature to hide, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. But here, through Mary, we see that in all things, in the good and the bad, through everything, we can fall at His feet, even when there is pain and weakness, even when there is doubt or blame or anger.

There is a chapter in Rachel Evan's book called "Searching For Sunday." In her chapter titled "Dirty Laundry," she writes about the weekly AA meetings in the church being one of the holiest hours in the church, when people do the sacred act of telling one another the truth. She writes, "We all move through the world in the same state- broken and beloved- and that we're all in need of healing and grace. They embolden us to confess to one another not only our sins, but also our fears, our doubts, our questions, our injuries and our pain. They give us permission to start telling one another the truth, and to believe that this strange way of living is the only way to set one another free...The truth is, we think church is for people living in the "after" picture. We think church is for taking spiritual Instagrams and putting on our best performances. We think church is for the healthy, even though Jesus told us time and time again he came to minister to the sick. We think church is for good people, not resurrected people. So we fake it. We pretend we don't need help and we act like we aren't afraid, even though no decent AA meeting ever began with, "Hi, my name is Rachel, and I totally have my act together."

Mary lived a life of intimacy with God, meaning that she moved toward God whether she had her act together, or falling apart sobbing at his feet. Living a life of intimacy means that we live transparently and honestly before God and one another. It means we are beloved AND

broken. Intimacy means taking all that you are, the messy and weak, the joy and the pain, and drawing near to God and Christian community.

The last story we finish with today is a one of lavish devotion to Jesus. Mary takes an alabaster jar of ointment so costly it takes a year of wages for one pint of pure nard. Again, before Jesus and others, she is at His feet. John chapter 12:3 says, "*Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair.*" Pastor Dan preached a sermon called Alabaster Jar not too long ago from the book of Mark. If you want to dive into the details of this story, you can find the sermon on the FPC website under "Messages" (fpchawaii.org).

When Mary broke that alabaster jar and poured the perfume on Jesus feet, her act of lavish devotion caught a lot of flack from others. It was over the top and people thought she was being wasteful. But Mary's act of worship and devotion to Jesus was anointing Him for burial. Jesus knew that He would soon be killed. What Mary did blessed His heart. In fact, He said her act will always be remembered.

Three times we find Mary at the feet of Jesus: 1) Mary, close to Jesus and listening deeply to His words. 2) Mary, crying and falling at the feet of Jesus. 3) Mary pouring perfume on His feet and wiping it with her hair in a lavish act of love and devotion.

At the beginning of today's message, I asked a question - what would compel someone to keep coming back to Jesus in this manner? Mary understood Jesus was the center of her life. She knew that listening to His words gave life and meaning, and that she could turn to her loving Savior and trust Him even in her pain and grief. Mary understood the profound act of devotion to her Lord, an action that was the response of His abundant love and acceptance of her (the paradigm of the gospel). Ultimately, it was out of an intimate relationship with Jesus that led Mary to live a life of worship unto God.

With each act of Mary at the feet of Jesus, we see Him respond. Twice He defends her to those who are critical of her actions. He responds to Martha who criticizes Mary. He responds to Judas and the crowd who criticize the pouring of the nard. And in response to Mary's grief and sorrow, Jesus weeps along with her. And then we see him raising her brother Lazarus from the dead!

Know that Jesus will always respond. It may not be in the way we expect, or always in our timeline, but know that God will always respond, and that we can trust in Him who is the definition of love. Jesus is not put off by our weakness and brokenness. He empathizes with us and holds us in our pain. He works to bring the dead things in our lives back to life! The enemy responds with the goal to destroy us, but God is on our side to bring healing and wholeness.

There is one other act of love that is related to feet, but it's not around the feet of Jesus. It's actually around the feet of the disciples. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, when they were having the last supper together, Jesus put a towel around his waist, stooped down and washed the dirty feet of His disciples (John 13:4-5).

An act delegated to the servants, Jesus cleaned the sweaty, stinky, dust covered feet of His disciples. Peter was shocked and embarrassed at Jesus washing his feet. He yelled, "NO Jesus! Never shall you wash my feet!" Perhaps he was embarrassed to have his mentor and teacher and Lord stoop down and wash his dirty stinky feet. Why would our Lord and Savior want to have any part with such grime and dirt?

We may relate to Peter, thinking, "Jesus, you don't want to wash my dirty feet. My stuff is embarrassing for you to wash. I don't want to show you my dirt, my shame, the hurt and pain that's there. I'm not worth you washing me clean."

But that's exactly what Jesus does. In an act of love and humility, Jesus demonstrated His love for us, and what we should do for one another. God's love stooped down into our grime and dirt, in our shame and sin, and His love washed us clean. When Jesus went to the cross and carried our sins, He took all our dirt and grime, our sin. God makes us clean. He restores us and calls us to restore one another.

There may have been choices in life that led us down a path we regret, distractions that took us away from the feet of Jesus, troubles that hardened our hearts to God, or choices that brought much pain and damage to ourselves and those around us. But no matter how far away, or for how long you've drawn away from Jesus, He longs to have you find Him again. He assures you of His love.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, He took bread, and after He had given thanks, He said, "This is my Body, BROKEN for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, after supper, He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, poured out for you. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again.

Will you pray with me: God, thank you for your love, for the sacrifice of your son Jesus. Thank you for drawing us closer to you and loving us no matter what our past, no matter the times we've draw way. We want to sit at your feet and listen for Your voice and be led by Your truth. Holy Spirit, come fill us and guide us. We give You our fears, or doubt, our pride and selfishness, and ask that you move powerfully in and through us, that others may experience your love and see your glory. In Christ's name, Amen.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts, as well as audio & video recordings of sermons, are also available at fpchawaii.org by clicking the MESSAGES tab.