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John 12: 1-19

“Waste Not”

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1969 was a great year!

Not only was it the year that my parents perfected their family after welcoming their youngest child and only son into the fold – in case your wondering 1969 is the year I was born.

1969 was also the year that the Honeywell Kitchen computer hit the market.

Did you purchase a Honeywell Kitchen Computer?

Don't be alarmed if you didn't because no one did.

Although computers had been around for several years – usually as room-size mainframes used by businesses and governments.

In 1969, the first PC for home use was offered in the Neiman Marcus catalog (for the younger ones in here think Amazon in paperback form).

It was a stand-up model with a built-in countertop called the Honeywell Kitchen Computer.

It listed for \$10,600.00 (back then, I'm told, you could still get a car for \$2,000.00).

The kitchen computer was aimed at homemakers with the intention of being used for recipe management.

At that time, the only home computing power use the Honeywell engineers could think of was recipe management and maybe checkbook balancing.

Whelp, can we really be surprised that not a single Honeywell Kitchen Computer sold?

Since then, we know that the price of computers has come way down, and we even have mini-computers at our finger tips in the form of smart phones.

Part of this is due to what is called Moore's Law – a prediction made by Gordon Moore, co-founder of the Intel Corporation in the mid-1960s – Moore indicated the number of transistors that could be placed on a microprocessor would double about every 18 months & this would eventually bring the cost of computing power down.

That said, something else occurred in the 1970s, while the cost of computing power was still very high. Alan Kay, an engineer at Xerox, decided to do what one observer called “wasting transistors.” Instead of reserving the pricey power of computers at his disposal for “valuable” functions like information processing – he began using it for “frivolous” stuff like drawing onscreen cartoons. He created such on-screen things like pointers and windows which eventually became the first graphical interface, and these gave life to the Macintosh computer. The Mac, in turn, inspired similar changes in PCs.

By “wasting” computing power, Alan Kay made computers simple enough for people like me to use.

Wired magazine's, editor-in-chief, Chris Anderson wrote regarding this phenomenon, "This is the power of waste. When scarce resources become abundant, smart people treat them differently, exploiting them rather than conserving them. It feels wrong, [however] done right, it can change the world."

Before that can happen, while the resource is still scarce, somebody must use it in an **extravagant**, though some might call "**wasteful**," way.

Sound familiar?

It should – we just read about it in our text this morning from John 12.

Jesus is supping with Mary, Martha and Lazarus in their home.

During the dinner, Mary takes "a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair."

So aromatic was this perfume that we are told its fragrance filled the whole house.

One commentary indicates it would *overwhelm the house*.

The fragrance and quantity notation here in John let us know that Mary's act is one of extravagance.

It also might be commentary on Martha's quip to Jesus about not wanting him to roll the stone back at Lazarus' tomb for fear that the stench of death would be overpowering.

Here, in their home, with now alive Lazarus sitting among them, Mary's extravagant action of anointing with nard, has replaced the fear of the once lingering death smell that had previously resided in their home with the fragrance of love and devotion and service.

However, like I once heard, every party has a balloon popper, Mr. Judas pipes in with his pointed statement, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii [nearly a year's wages for a laborer] and the money given to the poor?"

Now, before we delve into how this question was received, let's check out some of the Gospel writer John's parenthetical notes regarding Judas.

John's author describes Judas Iscariot as "the one who was about to betray [Jesus]" ~ John is connecting Judas with Jesus' death.

John's author also says of Judas Iscariot "He [made that comment about the poor] 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." ~ John is delegitimizing Judas before Judas even speaks and negates Judas' complaint about expenditure of the nard because it is offered by one who is untrustworthy.

John chooses his words carefully...the word thief takes us back to John 10 – the sheep, the shepherd and the thief. It's the word "kleptos" – used to describe the one who threatens the flock. (John 10.1, 8, 10)

The thief doesn't care about the sheep...Judas doesn't care about the poor.

It also sets the context for interpreting Judas' future actions: when Judas betrays Jesus...Judas betrays the sheep.

Another instance underscoring the importance of the fourth evangelist's word choice occurs even before Judas' objection, when he states that Mary "wiped" Jesus' feet with her hair.

Ekmasso – to wipe – the same verb to describe Jesus' wiping his disciple's feet in 13.5 when he washes their feet.

Mary's action & Judas' response foreshadow Jesus' farewell meal.

The Mary event we read in John 12 is connected to Jesus' farewell meal in John 13.

John is directing our vision to where we can begin to see the bridge & link between this meal in Bethany, at the home of Lazarus whom [Jesus] had raised from the death...and that other meal encounter in an upper room between Jesus and his disciples.

Interestingly, we also see it in the way that John's writer chooses to impugn Judas' character – while having Jesus challenge Judas' assumption that the use of the fragrant and costly nard was "wasteful."

"Leave her alone," Jesus chides Judas.

"[She's doing this] in order that she might keep it for the day of my burial."

This act and encounter anticipate Jesus' final anointing and confirms the impending arrival of Jesus' hour.

John has been pointing us toward Jesus' hour...and that hour is almost here.

For John's gospel, Mary & Judas help us see what faithful and unfaithful discipleship look like.

In reverse order, Judas first:

Judas responds to the notion of Jesus' final hour not with an act of love – rather with an act of self-centered disdain.

Judas response leads to flock destruction.

Mary – on the other hand – models a life of love which is characteristic of Jesus' sheep.

Mary's witness is powerful.

Mary knows how to respond without being told.

Mary fulfills Jesus' love command (which we will come to in John 13.34-35) even before Jesus teaches it. *[Which prompts in my mind a rabbit trail type line of questions, did Mary's act here provide the inspiration for Jesus' act in John 13? Did Mary's act here inform Jesus' command to love one another he imparts on the disciples?]*

Mary gives boldly and extravagantly – regardless of how others might view her action.

Mary's anointing of Jesus allows us to see that faithful discipleship is most fully revealed in community through acts of love which come as grateful response to Jesus' grace act.

The 4th Evangelist's end vision is a community shaped by love & grounded in relationship to Jesus.

Let's not overlook the importance of the fourth Evangelist placing and naming a woman as the first to understand and live out discipleship in response to God's great grace.

John names a woman as the first to embody the love commanded of all disciples.

Discipleship does not – according to the 4th Evangelist, John – conform to any stereotypical assumption about the composition of Jesus' faithful followers.

In a time when conventional standards did not give status or claim to women, the 4th Evangelist – names women as the first to “get it” – we've seen it before – think back to chapter 4 and Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria.

Jesus' disciples – faithful followers – come from a varied and diverse demographic.

As Faithful Followers – Dedicated Disciples – we are a people, like Mary
whom Jesus loves
who love Jesus
& who live out that love in extravagant ways.

And we do so knowing some will call it wasteful, however,

“This is the power of waste. When scarce resources become abundant, smart people treat them differently, exploiting them rather than conserving them. It feels wrong, [however] done right, it can change the world.”

That is why we come to this Table.

That is what we experience at this Table.

That is what we take from this Table.

Let's get extravagant!

Alleluia & Amen!