

Word of Life Lutheran Brethren Church
Community Group Bible Study – week of March 8th
John 12:1-11

Open with prayer as you begin. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind in order to understand God's Word.

What's the most extravagant gift that you've ever given or the most "over the top" thing you've ever done for someone? Why did you give it? Do you regret giving it?

Is there something inherently wrong with extravagance?

Remember the context of what you're about to read:

In John 10 we read that the Jews in Jerusalem attempted to stone Jesus, but he had escaped with his disciples across the Jordan River. Sometime after this incident he received a message from Martha and Mary that their brother Lazarus was sick. Jesus delayed for two days and then proceeded back across the Jordan to Bethany (only 2 miles from Jerusalem). In front of many witnesses from Jerusalem, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. This only increased the Jewish leadership's desire to kill Jesus, so Jesus and his disciples refrained from public ministry and withdrew to a city called Ephraim (John 11:54). One week before the Passover (and his eventual crucifixion) Jesus returned to Bethany to attend a dinner given in his honor.

Read John 12:1-11

From what we read in the Gospel of John, there was little contact between Jesus and Lazarus after he was raised from the dead. Jesus did not "hang out" for very long and the people's attention was likely directed at Lazarus since he was the one who came back to life. This dinner was the occasion that Lazarus and his sisters could thank Jesus properly. The dinner took place at the home of a man named Simon the Leper (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9). Although he is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture, it is safe to presume that he was an ex-leper who had been healed by Jesus.

What are you most grateful for? How have you shown your gratitude? What has it motivated you to do or give?

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Lazarus' sister Mary decides to do something for Jesus. When the Bible describes the diners as “reclining” at the table we need to understand that they did not sit in chairs. They literally lay down with their heads at the table, propped up on a pillow with their feet behind them. This gives Mary the opportunity to do something extravagant.

How expensive was this perfume?

Does this strike you as a little foolish? Why or why not?

The text says that Mary used her hair to wipe Jesus' feet after she poured the perfume on them. If she had thought about doing this ahead of time, she might have had a towel ready to use, but if this was an impromptu gesture of love (which I think it was), she would not have a towel or rag at her disposal. So what does she use instead?

Why does Judas object to Mary's act? Does his objection sound vaguely spiritual?

Jesus does not allow Judas to continue with his objection. Rather he connects Mary's act with the preparation for his own death. Perfume like this was often used along with other spices to prepare a body for burial. The next day Jesus will enter Jerusalem to a palm waving crowd, and 5 days later he will die on a cross on Good Friday.

Compare Mary and Judas. What motivates them? Are there people like both of them in every church?

End with this question:

What has Christ's extravagant love for you motivated you to do or give? How have you responded to the gift that Jesus gave you? We can't repay him for the cross, and we cannot attempt to earn what he gives freely. But we are called to love him in response to his love for us (1 John 4:19).

Close in prayer.