



Sermons from Northwood United Church

“Cleaning House: Let It Be”

John 12:1-8

Will Sparks March 6th 2016

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I ran across a TED talk the other day. Are you familiar with the TED talks, where people have a chance to take one really important, like life-work kind of important, idea and talk about it for a few minutes- distill it down to its essence and put it before people. Well David Brooks, a New York Times Columnist, author and thinker about deep things did a 5 minute TED Talk last year in which he says that there are two sets of values in competition within us all: resume values, and eulogy values. And he says we need to decide which kinds of values we are going to live for. Resume values are like achievement, skill, doing something well, the things you put on a resume, and eulogy values are more of the depth dimension, love, loyalty, who we are, not what we do, the kinds of things people say about you after you are gone. It's a good TED Talk.

https://www.ted.com/talks/david_brooks_should_you_live_for_your_resume_or_your_eulogy?language=en

Well what David Brooks is essentially advocating is living for eulogy values, living for the depth dimension, living for the sake of being not just doing. And every once in a while we see someone doing exactly that, letting go of making something of their life, and being something.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, had seen a few things in her life. She had been a follower of Jesus now for a few years. They were close friends. She had seen him heal, watched and heard him inspire people with the gospel way of being, seen him tangle with the religious authorities, and perhaps most strikingly, watched as he brought her brother back from death. And here he was, back in her house, on his way to Jerusalem where he would walk into the biggest conflict of his life. And she knew there was a lot at stake. How could she offer him support? How could she show her commitment and affection? What could she do that would adequately show that she was all in.

She took a jar of nard, a kind of perfume, hugely precious and expensive, that people saved up for their whole lives so that they would be able to care for the body when a loved one when they died- to care for them in their death. And she broke it open, poured it all out, and bathed his feet in it. This is a powerful, costly, deeply intimate and bold act of love. She took the thing that was meant for care of the dead and offered it in care for the living. She faced the wrath of those who were living for their resume in order to pour it out in an act of love that would be mentioned in her eulogy.

Our theme throughout the season of Lent has been Cleaning House, the way of letting go, clearing out both physically in order to live a lighter more focussed life, but also clearing out internally, letting go and trusting. And I guess what Mary puts in front of us today is a kind of ultimate letting go-letting go of the power that our own mortality wields in our lives. We do a lot of things to avoid the reality of death in our life. There is a whole industry out there to mask the effects of aging, getting old. And staying young and healthy is a good thing, but it can take on a desperate tone, and when that happens we know that mortality is jerking us around.

We followers of Jesus are people of the resurrection. We are followers of the one who said, I am the resurrection and the life, followers of the one who refused to bow down to those

who threatened him with death. He knew that there are more important things than simply surviving. If our fear of death keeps us from living, then something needs to change. We need to face our mortality, come to terms with it, so that we can live free of its grip on our life. Mary show us that when we come to terms with our mortality, we can pour ourselves out in life with a new kind of generosity, and freedom. We can start living for our eulogy, and not just our resume.

At bible study this week Delores put me on to the words of the mother of Sarah Burke who this week told of something her daughter did. Sarah Burke was a Canadian freestyle skier who won four gold medals in 2010 in Winter X games and was instrumental in the half-pipe becoming an Olympic sport in the 2014 games. Unfortunately Sarah died in a terrible accident training for her sport in Utah in 2012 at the age of 24. When she died her family was faced with the very difficult decision of whether to use her young, healthy organs for transplant. They looked for a donor card that would give them a clear sense of what Sarah would have wanted. Fortunately they found it, and, as if she anticipated this eventuality, Sarah had written across the side of the donor card, "Take it all!"

That's living for the eulogy, not for the resume- not holding it back for fear of death. That's taking the most precious gift we have, our very life, who we are, and giving it away, pouring it out, trusting that the one who gave us this life in the first place will be faithful, will sustain us. In the end, it is about trusting God with our life and our death, pouring ourselves out for the sake of love in the world, following in the way of the resurrected one as a way of life.
Amen