

"Reckless Gratitude" Luke 7:36-8:3
Church of the Good Shepherd- Nashua, NH
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If you're having that experience of Déjà vu all over again, then you're not the only one. When I preached here in March, John's gospel lesson for that day also was about a woman breaking a jar of ointment over Jesus feet and wiping them with her hair. The setting and details were different from the gospel story we heard this morning, but the nugget is the same. Preaching on the same story twice in a short period of time is a challenge no preacher can resist.

In John's version, over dinner at Martha and Lazarus' house, their sister did the anointing and the horrified reaction was about money. In Luke's version, the reaction was more about sex: the unnamed woman has a questionable reputation and she cries a lot in the process of cleaning Jesus' feet with the ointment and her hair...both embarrassingly intimate and sexual gestures. And even though many biblical scholars agree that the anointing woman is not Mary Magdalene, who is mentioned later in this passage, tradition has incorrectly gone with that interpretation. The Christian tradition's discomfort with women and sexuality has been collapsed into an interpretation that sets up the virgin-whore archetype. Mary Magdalene is seen the forgiven prostitute and Mary the Mother of Jesus as the Virgin. But I digress- that's another sermon.

I do want to link Mary Magdalene with the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus feet, but not in the same way that tradition joins the two. The link between Mary Magdalene and this woman is not identity, but gratitude. They are both deeply grateful to Jesus for the gifts of love, forgiveness, healing, empowerment, and acceptance. If John's anointing story was about generosity, then Luke's is about gratitude, with two women who express their gratitude in different ways.

Gratitude. Being thankful, grateful. It's no secret that gratitude is getting a lot of press these days. Research is showing that keeping a gratitude journal can increase your sense of well-being and life satisfaction. (Robert Emmons. *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*). Keeping a gratitude journal- writing down two or three things a day that you are thankful for- is a simple spiritual practice. My family has a dinner ritual where each of us shares something we are grateful for that

day...it has to be something different every day. It's not hard; the list is endless. Expressing gratitude lifts your mood, shifts your perspective, makes you happier, and helps you to re-write narratives of lack into stories of abundance. For what are you grateful? How do you express your gratitude?

With her tears and the perfume that creeps into everyone's unconscious, the woman labeled a sinner expresses lavish gratitude for forgiveness and acceptance, for being seen for who she truly is. Hers is a ritual act of gratitude. Mary Magdalene expresses her gratitude differently.

We are told that Mary Magdalene was healed of seven demons, some kind of ailment that is unspecified but severe. In her poem "Magdalene- The Seven Devils" (Hear her read it here:

<http://www.onbeing.org/program/feature/magdalene-the-seven-devils-by-marie-howe/5336>) Marie Howe speculates about Mary's demons in a way that we can relate them to our own lives. Demons of busyness, worry, anxiety, envy, fear of making the wrong choices, obsessive thoughts, the devil of knowing she could never get to the end of the list of her demons without constantly adding and re-prioritizing, the demon of never getting the laundry done, the demon of being haunted by her mother's death... and at the end of the poem Howe writes of Mary saying to Jesus: "And that I didn't think you—if I told you—would understand any of this."

But he does understand...

Mary Magdalene expresses her gratitude by following Jesus, by using her social position and financial resources to support his ministry, by refusing to abandon him when he was crucified, by being able to recognize him as alive beyond death, and by joyfully proclaiming what she knows to be true: that love is stronger than death.

The Story is about gratitude. For what are you grateful? Of what demons have you been healed? And how will you say thank you? AMEN.