

John 12:1-8
April 3

I've been thinking lately about how lucky we are to have such gifted preachers here at holy trinity:

both lay members of the congregation

and occasional guests,

each of whom broadens my horizons by bringing their own authentic approach to engaging with the gospel.

Steve inspires me w the sweep and depth of his theological, mystical and philosophical approach:

Eric's gruff humor always brings history and humanity into the room.

I'm grateful to Aldon and Elaine for their pastoral approach,

And to Morley, the theologian in residence w ekklesia who reminds us that the conversation between art and faith has existed for centuries.

And then there is Ted.

Ted who leads us humbly and courageously and radically into beloved community, who suffered a stroke on Tuesday evening and is at Middlesex Hospital.

And as we look to the future I'm looking forward to inviting my good friend Ranjit, the newly appointed canon for Racial Justice, Reconciliation and Mission Advocacy to this pulpit to preach social justice with pastoral humility and reverent attunement to differences of opinion

Peter's dad will preach at his granddaughter's baptism on May 8th

And James and Ash and Peter and Bill : and so many others...I believe each of you are called to speak in church

I hope you will begin to feel empowered to offer personal testimonies:

We know Christ through each other.

your witness in your voice in this space will make Jesus's presence stronger. Period.

And that is what we need to thrive. The realization voiced as only you can...that Jesus **is alive**

I recognized recently what may be my primary approach to preaching in the title of a wonderful book by Francis Spufford :

It is called *Unapologetic: Why despite everything Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense.*

Faith for me answers an emotional and psychological question that i've been asking my whole life

What heals people?

And Jesus is the very large all-encompassing name for what is my visceral answer.

I don't mean to suggest my approach isn't also theological and historical and Biblical or that Steve and Eric aren't emotional... far from it... but we speak in our own voices. And more voices from this pulpit are all gain. My vision of leadership is and will always be collaborative and hybrid. To see Jesus clearly, fully, **alive**, enfleshed, our savior...I believe we need **the whole world.**

Consider this week's story:

Mary is anointing Jesus's feet with expensive oil and wiping his feet with her hair. You'd have to look to the *Song of Solomon* for another image as tender and intimate and sensual as this one. A young woman using her hair to wipe precious oil between each of Jesus's toes. Not the usual space of imagination on a Sunday morning in church in still somewhat puritan America. And it's right there in the Gospel.

I believe this tender intimate space is exactly what we are now called to lengthen into, especially *this* Lent. This Lent when the news of the day makes *the terror of bombing and running in fear and people dying in smoke and fire* much more available to our senses and our imagination than *the sensation of oil and human hair rubbed into tender human skin*.

And my friends more than anything else, we need to come out of this pandemic still able **to feel, still able to feel and touch and hug each other without fear.**

So what do you think. Might it be time to reinstate sharing the peace with each other? (discussion followed)

So here we are, at Mary and Martha's house. Lazarus is reclining on a sofa. Maybe he is resting, seeing as Jesus has recently raised him from the dead which has to take a lot out of a guy. Mary seems to realize that Jesus's show of supernatural power will threaten the Roman authorities who want to see *themselves* as gods. And Mary sees with the true sight of great love that Jesus will pay the ultimate price for saving her brother and she knows what authoritarian leaders rulers do when they are threatened; they kill people.

And so what does she do with this perception of threat and imminent death, does she shrivel up with guilt, ashamed of what she may feel she has helped bring to pass? Or does she refuse to engage out of fear? No. She picks up Jesus feet, these precious particular feet, the feet that she seems to know will soon have nails hammered through them...And instead of being reduced to powerlessness, *because of future horrors she cannot control or past horrors she cannot face*, she sees with the eyes of love what is precious and this perception is powerful beyond measure and she sees with the eyes of love what is precious and this perception is beyond price. What is right in front of her and right in front of us won't be here forever and neither will we. *We have limited time to gladden the hearts of those who walk with us, so be swift to love and make haste to be kind.*

Mary lifts each foot gently and massages it with a *pound* of infinitely expensive nard, strongly scented with spices made for burial and caresses each foot with her hair. She sacralizes with her actions what is most precious. This skin. This face. These feet. This body. This blood.

Jesus will do the same...learning perhaps from Mary... when he washes his disciples feet in just a few short days.

This skin. This face. This body. This blood. Do this because you are beloved children of God. Do this in remembrance of me.

And we can pray that Jesus in extremis on Cavalry in a few short days and each of us at the time of our own trials will remember the scent of that nard and the touch of those hands and feel of that hair and the truth that we are beloved.

How precious is the gift of deeper relationship that the church invites us into if only we are willing to acknowledge it

That reveals that we are of one body with our closest friends

And one body with the person we don't know who came here today for the first time.

One body with Zoe in the booth

One body with the people at Perk or Ford's Diner that may not even know in so many words that we love them.

In fact *we may not yet even truly know that we love them*

That yes, we would harbor them in our homes as the old ukrainian couple in Lviv harboured my nephew this week as bombs exploded in the distance and the curfew fell and this quiet Ukrainian mother took him by the hand at the bus station and pulled him down the road and into her home to sleep on her sofa and made him a good breakfast in the morning even though they didn't speak one word of the same language and she didn't really understand why he was there. We are one body. And I think the sensuality and tenderness that I hear in this passage today is the most radical push back against the bombs that destroy and the words that divide us that I can imagine. It is also the embodied place of empathy to begin to heal the pain of our racial histories as we saw at the panel after Traces of the Trade last week. Not with guilt which shrivels us but with an empathy that deepens us.

Our minds ARE miraculous: they can attempt to understand, to justify, to rationalize, to analyze, to rectify wrongs and provide calculations and proffer astounding solutions but we feel *empathy and kinship in our bodies where Christ is ALIVE*

So in honor of the horrors we cannot control, the problems we can not solve...look for moments of deep enjoyment this afternoon. Take a deep breath. Do it in honor of the Ukrainians in subway tunnels. May they find the space to breathe. Be aware of a moment of safety and do this in honor of people whose bodies don't always feel safe or beloved. May they find refuge. Do it in remembrance of Mary who held Jesus's feet in her hands as the whole world hung in the balance.

And do it in remembrance of Bishop Tutu: who led the way in South Africa into truth and reconciliation. Here is his prayer for us

Dear Child of God

You are loved with a love that nothing can shake, a love that loved you long before you were created, a love that will be there long after everything has disappeared. You are precious, with a preciousness that is ...immeasurable. And God wants you to be like God. filled with life and goodness and laughter ...and joy.

Remember that God who is forever pouring out God's whole being from all eternity, wants you to flourish. Remember that God who is forever pouring out God's whole being from all eternity, wants you to be filled with compassion which will lead you into joy

You my friends are worthy of nard.

amen