

April 20, 2008

Title: Love Deeper

Text: John 12:1-8

Thesis: Love is a gift God gives...to be given.

Series Introduction;

Tim McGraw's hit song *Live Like You Were Dying* is the springboard for the current series of messages. The song is the story of a man who learned he was dying of a fatal disease and what he learned about living his final days well. It is a song about what he found to be important and how he hoped everyone could have the chance to live like they only had thirty days to live.

The series is based on the materials provided for the Live Like You Were Dying Church Campaign Resource Kit available from WWW.LLYWD.ORG. In addition to the suggested sermon titles and general outlines, I have attempted to cite any other specific references lifted from the resources.

Message Introduction:

Two Sundays ago, we talked about change and what we do when we begin to live like we were dying. We talked about seizing each day as a gift from God and the importance of living with a sense of urgency, keeping eternity in mind, of slowing down, and reordering our priorities to focus on your relationships with God and others.

Last week we talked about the power of words and how we can use our days to speak words of appreciation, encouragement, and to pray for the people in our lives. We thought about how we can learn to speak sweeter.

I would like for us to take a moment to watch a "man on the street" clip as we begin.

Video clip: *Love Deeper*

Today we are going to talk about loving deeper.

One of the anecdotal stories I have accumulated over the years is that of an elderly man who visited his doctor's office early one morning to have some stitches removed from his thumb. I don't know where I got the story or to who to give credit, but it is a good story.

As the nurse was removing his sutures, she asked him about his day and he said he was in kind of a hurry. She inquired as to why he was in a hurry and he told her that he needed to get to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife, who had been in the nursing home for some time.

As the nurse was dressing his wound, she asked if his wife would be upset if he was a little late. He told her no, that that his wife had Alzheimer's, and that she no longer knew who he was and had not recognized him for almost five years.

The nurse was surprised and asked him, "And you still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?"

Then, patting the back of the nurse's hand, he replied, "She doesn't know who I am, but I still know who she is."

In the video clip, we heard people say that love isn't just about saying it, though last week we learned that it is important to say it. We heard people say that love is also something you show... something you do. Loving deeper is an activity. We say it but we also do it.

I had been nervously anticipating the end of March and the expiration of my bank debit card after 03/08. However, I need not have troubled myself. Before the end of March, I received a new debit card that will be in effect until 03/11. But the fact that I had a new debit card extending my banking privileges until March of 2011 did not mean it would work. Because, across the face of the card was an adhesive strip informing me that I had to call a 1-800 number to activate the card. The card was of no value until it was activated.

That is how it is when it comes to loving deeper. We need to say words of love but beyond the words are actions. In order to love deeper, we must activate our words and put them into action.

We put words into action when we show someone what we mean. If a young man comes to our church and asks if he can do some community service, I can hand him some trimmers and a saw and say, go cut down that bush. Or, I can take him to the bush, and show him how to use the trimmer and the saw. Then I hand them to him and say, "Here you go. Cut down this bush."

When it comes to loving, we may say love but we say love louder when we show love... not in ways that please ourselves but in self-giving and sacrificial ways that please the person we wish to receive our love.

Actions really do speak louder than words. Jesus essentially said, "The proof is in the pudding" when he said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." John 13:35

Our text today is the basis for our discussion about how it is we love deeper by demonstrating or showing love for another person.

Six days before the Passover began, Jesus arrived at the home of Lazarus – the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Lazarus's sister Martha served, and Lazarus sat at the table with him. Then Mary, (Lazarus' other sister) took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would betray Jesus said, "That perfume is worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor – he was a thief and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did it in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."
John 12:1-8

As we begin to unwrap this story we find that there are three steps to loving deeper. The first way we can love deeper is to do the unexpected.

1. Do the unexpected

I doubt that the thought lingering in the back of Jesus' mind, as he sat there over a rack of lamb with mint jelly, was that someone was about to pour perfume over his feet... in the AFL and the NFL winning coaches have come to expect that some exuberant players will douse him with a large cooler of icy Gatorade after a team win. However, a coach would be surprised if players doused him with \$165 bottle of Acqua Di Gio by Giorgio Armani Splash for Men. And I am sure Jesus did not expect that Mary or anyone else for that matter would do what she did when she did.

I am always a little reluctant to suggest that what Martha was doing was not also an expression of love... I am sure she had prepared, served, and cleaned up after as an expression of love. But what she did was also expected. I am grateful to God for the people who do the expected acts of love and consideration. But in our story it is the unanticipated and unexpected expression of love that demonstrates a way we can love deeper.

We generally love in expected ways. We remember to be loving on birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's and Father's Day. We remember to tip our paper carrier and maybe even our mail carrier at Christmas time. We remember to leave tips for those who serve us.

However, Walter “Buck” Sword did not do the expected.

CNN.com ran an AP story about a crotchety man named Walter Sword. Everyday he ate at Luby’s Cafeteria, where the only person in the restaurant who would serve him was a young woman named, Melina Salazar. For seven years, she smiled through his ranting. Then one day in July of 2007, she read in the paper that her cranky customer had passed away. Months later, a few days before Christmas, Melina Salazar learned that he had left her \$50,000 and a 2000 Buick in his will.

The CNN interviewer noted that for Salazar, “Kindness was not just a job, but a way of life.” She was unexpectedly kind to Mr. Sword for years... and then one day, Walter Sword was unexpectedly kind to the person who served him at Luby’s. (CNN.comUs, AP, Foul-mouthed customer leaves \$50,000 to waitress, December 29, 2007)

Perhaps, one aspect of loving deeply is to do the unexpected, but not to wait until you die to do it. Do the unexpected act of kindness now!

A second insight lifted from the text is that loving deeper may mean doing something unaffordable.

2. Do the unaffordable

The bible story says that when Judas saw Mary pouring a 12-ounce bottle of Essence of Nard over Jesus, he took exception. The text we just read said the value of the perfume was equivalent to an average yearly earning. The LNT says that Judas referred to the value as “a small fortune.”

None among us, from the most affluent to the least, can really fathom spending our entire yearly earnings on a 12-ounce bottle of perfume. Then to pour it on someone’s feet... is even more unfathomable.

We don’t know if it was a pleasant fragrance or not. They say that when it comes to perfume, “One man’s pudding is the next man’s tar.”

In her article, *Everyone’s a Critic*, Ruth La Ferla cites perfume critic Luca Turin who, was quoted as having said, “Perfume is the only art in which there’s never been a true word spoken.” In other words, the fragrance industry does not want to hear the truth... they do not want to hear a critic say their fragrance “is like a railroad spike being driven through the brain.” They do not want their fragrances referred to as, ‘a “scrubber,” [which is] the kind of smell you can’t wash off fast enough.’ (Ruth La Ferla, *Everyone’s a Critic*, The New York Times, April 17, 2008)

However, while I get all distracted about just what kind of fragrance filled the house wondering if it would have affected my allergies like ragweed in

summertime, the point is that it was very costly... not only an unexpected but also, an unaffordable expression of love.

Fortunately the Christians who lived in Jerusalem during the first century did not share Judas' take on unexpected and unaffordable acts of kindness – thinking them “wasteful, inappropriate, and careless.” (Live Like You Were Dying Campaign, Love Deeper, P. 6)

We are told, that they held their possessions loosely.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. They held loosely all of their possessions. [They so loved Jesus and the fellow believers, they did the unexpected and unaffordable. Their love was over the top.]” Acts 4:32

In the Christian community of first century Corinth, we read of people living there also doing the unexpected and unaffordable.

“For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the gracious privilege of sharing in the gift for the Christians in Jerusalem.” II Corinthians 8:3-4

The concept of giving not only what is affordable but far more, and then begging for the privilege to give even more... is an extraordinary example of loving deeper.

Jesus sets the bar for giving the unexpected and unaffordable.

Jesus did the unexpected, unaffordable, and timely, in the now act of love that makes it possible for us to be forgiven our sins and be given the gift of eternal life.

“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us while we were still sinners.” Romans 5:6-8

Now, before you rush out of here and max our your credit card to book a cruise, or buy a great house during the slump in the housing market at a variable rate from a sub-prime lender, or buy that 0% down and no payments until 2010 on a new living room set, or an overly priced, unmarketable new car with a \$2,000 cash rebate for your spouse as an unexpected and unaffordable way to demonstrate your love... think again!

Unexpected and unaffordable is different for everyone. It is not necessarily about money. Jesus did not pass out winning lottery tickets... he gave his life. It may be about time or attention. Whatever it is, it is about consideration. It is about doing a sacrificial thing for someone else... something that is from you and for them. Your wife does not want a chain saw and your husband probably does not want symphony tickets.

Whatever unexpected and unaffordable thing you might do, do it now.

3. Do it now

There is a catchy country song by Dierks Bentley on the airwaves these days titled, *What Was I Thinking?* In the song he falls in love with a girl from southern Alabama, whose father is less than happy about the relationship. So while he and Becky try to stay a step ahead of her father's ire he sings, "I know what I was feeling, but what was I thinking?"

Perhaps doing it now is more about feeling and less about thinking. Maybe Mary realized that what she was feeling and decided to act before she thought too much and talked herself out of doing what she felt like doing. Maybe she knew that if she didn't pour the oil over Jesus' feet then and there, she might never have another opportunity to do so.

So she did it... she did the unexpected, the unaffordable, and she did it in the moment that it mattered. You recall, Judas, and perhaps some of the others who were there were not so much into unexpected and unaffordable acts of kindness and love. But Jesus came to her defense.

But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why berate her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want. But I will not be here with you much longer. She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time." Mark 14:6-8

Every time I read that passage I think of a conversation with Jim Quinn when he told the story of how his little niece announced she had learned her memory verse when she came home from Sunday School. And when her mother asked her to say it to her his niece said, "Her done what her could." Mary had seized the moment and "she done what her could." She seized the moment to "practice a random act of kindness and a senseless act of beauty." (Ann Herbert, thinkexist.com)

Conclusion:

A few years ago, Bob Greene, a columnist for the Chicago Tribune, wrote an article about what a father said to his three-and-a half year-old son who was dying of brain tumor. An excerpt goes like this:

“Dear Casey, As I lie in bed holding you, I am painfully aware that you will only be with us for a few more minutes or hours, and my heart breaks when I think of the struggles you have endured in the last eight months. I would give anything to switch places with you. Nothing would make me happier.

As you close your eyes and decide when you want to go to heaven, remember how proud I am of you. From the day you were born until today, you have brought me only joy. You have exceeded my highest expectations of what fatherhood would be like. You have not only been my son, you have been my dearest friend. Whenever I was at work or out of town, I would ache to be with you. I will miss you terribly.

“All I have learned from you validates that my life is on the right course and that my values are in the right place. How else could I have such a wonderful boy? For this, I thank you. We will never forget the happiness you brought to us. I am the luckiest man in the world to have been your father and friend. I love you madly. So Casey, it’s okay to close your eyes now. You don’t have to fight anymore. Thanks for being my son. Dad.”
(Live Like You Were Dying Campaign Resource – Love Deeper – Part 3, PP. 9 and 10)

We tell and retell stories like that because they are precious and memorable. We tell them and retell them and we hold them in the recesses of our memories because they are worth holding and because they represent the highest expression of love thought and expressed.

Jesus said of Mary’s unexpected, unaffordable, and spontaneous, in the now act of love: “I assure you, whenever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be talked about in her memory.” Mark 14:9

As we step into this new week, may we set about doing the unexpected, unaffordable, and spontaneous expressions of love for others... may we create memories that leave lasting impressions to the glory of God and the good of others.