Sermon- Called to Serve and Be Served

Scripture: John 12:1-7, John 13:1-5, 12-17

Today we continue on our journey through the BLESS series. Let me see how well you remember what each letter of the acronym stands for… Well, today we are going to look at what it means to serve our community. Service itself is not something that was brand new in what Jesus taught. But the way Jesus served people was very different and counter cultural and that is what we are going to explore today. For our reflection today, I chose two Gospel stories of Jesus involved in the act of service and in both those instances, what he does goes against the grain of what was normal in society. So let’s look at the instances one at a time.

I am going to start in a place that is inherently very difficult for a very generous and giving group of people like Mennonites to be. The story of Jesus being anointed by very expensive spikenard by Mary Magdalene.

So this is the story. Jesus is going to another party, this time at the home of a Pharisee. There are three of his favorite people there at the party. Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus. And on this occasion, Mary Magdalene who is so grateful for what driving out her demons, breaks out this super expensive jar of perfume, pours it on Jesus’ feet and wipes his feet with her hair. This was the most humble, selfless and monetarily expensive act of service on Mary’s part. What we know of the cost of this perfume comes from Judas Iscariot who estimates the price as 300 denarii. One denarii was one day’s wage so 300 denarii was one years wages. That is a lot of money. In today’s terms we are looking at a few tens of thousands of dollars for a bottle of perfume. That is actually where today’s most expensive perfumes range. The three most expensive perfumes in the market today cost $7000 per ounce, $4000 per ounce and $2000 per ounce. Now imagine a whole bottle of this perfume, maybe two or three ounces of the most expensive perfume worth $21,000 being poured on Jesus’ feet. Imagine the smell that would have filled the whole room. And as if that was not enough, she wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair giving Jesus the best foot massage or pedicure in the history of the world. It was an extravagant gesture. Now of course if there was any human being in the whole world who deserved this gesture, it was Jesus. But both Jesus and Mary received criticism for this act. But Jesus scolds the complainers, and defends and honors Mary Magdalene. In fact in the Gospel of Matthews rendering of this story, Jesus says this about Mary Magdalene’s gesture. He says, “wherever the Gospel is preached, in all the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her”. To help us analyse this story, I am actually going to look

What Jesus was willing to give.