

“Do you see this Woman?”

Message given by Tami Bradshaw on

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SLIDE “Do you see this Woman?”

Tami’s inner silent prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O God my Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

The lyrics to the song “Open the Eyes of my Heart, Lord” have been running through my head.

SLIDE Open the Eyes of my Heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart. I want to see you; I want to see you.

I have been spending time with the stories of women who anoint Jesus in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All four of the gospels contain a story about a woman who anoints Jesus; in some, the woman anoints his head and in other versions the woman anoint Jesus’s feet. And although in each gospel the story is a little different, I hear the same invitation from Jesus in each one. An invitation I would like to extend to you today. The invitation is to open your heart, your mind, your spirit and deeply experience God’s healing presence.

SLIDE Picture of Feet

The day before we left for our family trip to Hawaii, I got a pedicure. I wanted my feet to look good for our vacation. During the pedicure I sat in a comfy chair with my feet soaking in something that smelled heavenly. I felt gratitude to be pampered in such a way. It seemed like the technician who cared for my feet was also caring in some way for my

spirit. I considered saying to her, “hey, this reminds me of a great bible story” but I chickened out.

Years ago, I was part of the leadership team that planned a women’s retreat called “Heart Spa.” (Have items ready up on the stage). One of the activities of the retreat was a foot washing. We had a bunch of these tubs, some peppermint oil, warm water and towels. Many women mentioned to me that the foot washing was their favorite part of the retreat. The volunteers who actually washed the feet of all the participants said it was a powerful time of worship for them. It was a way to physically minister to their friends without using any words. And, of course, foot washing brings to mind our servant leader Jesus who washed his friends’ feet as part of the Last Supper.

Today, I am so pleased to be able to tell you a story about a woman who was not only audacious enough to crash a dinner party to wash Jesus’ feet; she washed the feet of our redeemer with her own tears.

SLIDE Picture of the book Entering the Passion of Jesus

Back in March of 2020, just before the pandemic broke out, I was leading a Lenten Bible Study called Entering the Passion of Jesus. The fourth chapter of the book is about Jesus and the woman who anoints him. I remember this well because that was the week the study had to move online to ZOOM. I was bummed that we could not meet in person because I had been planning to anoint the class as well as lead an anointing service with Pastor Karen as part of Holy Week. A few of you might have seen the little service on You Tube, but a service of anointing does not really work online. So in a way, today is an expansion of what I wanted to do to prepare for Easter of 2020.

The fourth chapter of the study Entering the Passion of Christ is titled The First Supper: Risking Rejection. The author of the book, Amy-Jill Levine, briefly looks at the stories of the anointing women through the lens of each gospel writer. I have included some of Amy-Jill's ideas in the Meditation Moments so I hope you will take a look at those this week. It will give you a chance to compare and contrast the gospel stories. But for now, let me say that one of the things I learned from this study is how to appreciate the unique ways that Matthew, Mark, John and Luke tell the story of the anointing woman.

Each gospel writer has his own memory of the event. Each of the gospel writers are experiencing this story of Jesus differently. Each of writer is looking at the story with a different lens. And each writer has a unique audience and purpose in retelling the story.

That makes me think about how we in current times, approach the Bible. As individuals we each have our unique lens or worldview with which we read the bible. This is why I love small group bible studies, because I get to hear what a bible passage means to each person in the group and my understanding is fuller than it would be if I just studied the passage on my own.

SLIDE Crazy Women

It's my understanding that there has been a long conversation about what to call this summer sermon series about biblical women. Months ago, I heard that Morgan, our former youth pastor, wanted to call the series "Crazy Women of the Bible". I was not a fan of that idea but it must have been meaningful in some important way to Morgan. Perhaps she thought it would be something that would catch our attention, something that would identify biblical women as exciting and

daring. The woman who anointed Jesus might have seemed crazy to Simon the Pharisee when she crashed his dinner party and started to weep and wash Jesus feet with her tears, then used her hair as a towel.

SLIDE Unseen Women

After Morgan left, Jeff decided to call this sermon series, Unseen Women of the bible. For me that title worked well because the name of my message today is “Do you see this Woman?” I want to highlight that Jesus really wants us to notice and remember the woman who anointed him. The theme of Unseen Women also resonates with my own personal experience of feeling unseen in the church and in the world.

SLIDE Radical Women

Stacey, our Creative Arts Director, emailed me a couple weeks ago and said she had met with the Creative Team. The Creative Team put forth the idea of Radical Women for the theme of this sermon series. It was my sense that they want to see biblical woman portrayed as strong, courageous and empowered. Which I love! And in a way the word radical fits the actions of the woman who anoints Jesus. She was definitely not following the normal expectations for women of her time.

Just like the authors of the gospels, we have an individual lens with which we look at the bible and experience our faith. We also have a unique need that we want met from the stories of the bible. Some folks want to see the female characters in the bible as exciting, as individuals who stand out and get our attention. There are folks who need to see women in the bible who are challenging the status quo.

I think this all awesome and that it goes way beyond gender. I believe the Holy Spirit is at work within all of us when we read the bible. The Holy Spirit can use the biblical text to speak to us and to our circumstances in the present moment. Each of us need to hear a word from God that is personal and intimate. I think it's very important to notice and honor that process with each person.

The lens I am looking through today is as a 52 year old woman with a life story like no one else's. A life filled with themes of love, grief, shame, healing and joy. The themes I want to highlight for the woman who anoints Jesus is forgiveness, healing and gratitude. I see the audacious anointing woman as, forgiven, healed and and grateful.

SLIDE Forgiven, Healed and Grateful

I see those themes in this story because that is what I want to claim for myself. I believe the Holy Spirit is prompting me to be a woman who embraces God's forgiveness and shows her gratitude for God's healing love.

So, let's look now at the story the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus. I am going to read the story as we find it in Luke 7:36-50. It's pretty long so take a deep breath, settle in and open up your ears.

SCRIPTURE Luke 7:36-50 NRSV

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisees house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him (Jesus) at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man

were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of a woman this is who is touching him-and that she is a sinner.” Jesus spoke up and said to him, “I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “speak.” “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which one of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But to the one whom little is forgiven, loves little.” Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

The theme of forgiveness seems pretty obvious here in the book of Luke, more so than in the other gospels. In the bible I have here, the editors chose little headings to help you find the story you are looking for. In both Matthew and Mark, the editors of my bible chose the heading “The Anointing at Bethany” to introduce the story we are looking at today. In John the heading is “Mary Anoints Jesus”. In the gospel of Luke the heading is “A Sinful Woman Forgiven”.

It seems like Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner to kind of check him out. I think he might have been curious about this man who was healing the sick and stirring up trouble with religious leaders. It does

not seem like Simon really understands who Jesus is and what kind of power he has. The woman however, seems to understand full well who Jesus Christ is. She comes to the dinner party uninvited, with an alabaster jar of expensive ointment. Then she begins to weep and wash the feet of Simon's guest with her tears! It's up to our imagination to fill in the details about how the woman knows Jesus. The woman is described as a sinner. I don't know what kind of sins she committed and to me it does not really matter. Through the story of the two debtors Jesus indicates that the woman had a lot going on that she needed forgiveness for.

At some point the woman must have heard Jesus preach his message of grace. Perhaps the words Jesus spoke were just the words her heart desperately needed to hear. And she must have believed that Jesus' message applied even to her. She opened her heart and accepted a chance to start a new life.

At the dinner party, the woman poured her heart out in gratitude. She felt released from a huge debt. The woman never uttered a word yet she performed one of the most beautiful expressions of gratitude found in the gospels. Her actions were as expressive as a thousand thank you notes.

I want to share a little bit about how I have experienced forgiveness in the last five years or so. Many of you know that my son Thomas died five years ago back in May. He died just before Mother's Day weekend. He died, filled with drugs when he ran out in front of a car going 60 miles per hour. His death was sudden and felt very public. There was an article about him on the front page of the paper.

Thomas had Reactive Attachment Disorder which caused a lot of pain, misunderstanding and shame in our family. In the years and months leading up to Thomas death I experienced the worst pain of my life to

date. I was isolated. No one seemed to understand the difficulty and reality of raising a young man like Thomas. He was so handsome and could be so charming. It was hard for people to believe in the darker part of him that I saw at home. I felt judged by others. I judged myself. I heard messages both internal and external saying to me, "You are a bad mother. You are a bad person."

During Thomas' service up at Fort Lewis college, there was a moment when Jeff was up front speaking and he was losing it. There were so many people there. Jeff was crying so hard it scared me. So I went up there and just held his hand while he took a breath. I looked out at all the people gathered there and felt this wave of emotion coming up at me. I felt immense sadness and the shame of my very public failure as a mom. It was too much. I went and sat back down.

Now Pastor Karen came aboard the staff right around the time of Thomas' death. Late that spring Jeff went to Annual Conference and I was scheduled to preach. I am not sure why we thought that would be a good idea. Just days before I was supposed to get up here and lead worship I became overcome with dread. I was scared that if I got up in front again, I would feel that overwhelming wave of emotion that I felt at Thomas' service. I was especially scared of the shame I might feel. I can relate to sinful woman in Luke's gospel who is so overcome with emotion that she has no words.

So, I call Karen and say "I can't do this." And Karen, who was still such a newbie covered for me at the last minute. I am still so grateful to Karen. And I am grateful for this second chance, five years later, to share a message in worship.

It has taken me all this time to open my heart and my mind to God's healing love. I have slowly allowed God to take the weight of shame off my chest. My spirit is so much lighter than it was five years ago. It's

taken months and months of worship, small groups, therapy, time in creation and prayer to release most of the pain and shame that I felt in trying to mother Thomas. Forgiveness, healing and gratitude have come to me slowly over time through practicing small spiritual disciplines.

SLIDE Picture of the Book Seven Words

One of the clearest ways God communicates love and forgiveness to me is through the small groups I have been a part of. Just this past Lent I lead Susan Robb's study Seven Words, listening to Christ from the Cross. The first phrase from the cross we studied was, "Father, forgive them." This passage is also found in the gospel of Luke.

Scripture Luke 23: 32-34 NRSV

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called the Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing." And they cast lots on his clothing.

Susan Robb invited my study group to consider whom Jesus is referring to when he says forgive them. Father forgive them, but who does he mean? Certainly, Jesus means the folks mocking and taunting him, the folks who are crucifying him. Susan Robb suggests that Jesus also means us. That Jesus is asking the Father to forgive us, to forgive me, right here right now. Our group talked about Jesus' ability to forgive is what makes him so powerful. Forgiveness is the hallmark feature of the Kingdom of God.

After this conversation with my small group I thought to myself, yes, God forgive me. Forgive me for not really understanding your message. And forgive me for all the mistakes I made as Thomas's mom. I didn't

know what I was doing as Thomas' mom. Many of the therapists and professional educators didn't know what they were doing. Thomas did not know the ways his actions hurt others. God, forgive me. I didn't know what I was doing. None of us really know what we are doing.

Through that conversation with my small group I felt compassion for myself and allowed God's forgiveness to take what was left of my hurt and shame. I am a sinful woman forgiven! If Jesus could see the love and gratitude of the anointing woman, surely he can see me! God extends forgiveness to me and I accept it. So now I cry, and I sing and I worship because I am so grateful that such a heavy burden has been taken away.

So, that is what the story of the anointing woman means to me, today. What parts of her story do you connect with? How does the Holy Spirit want to speak to you today?

SLIDE An invitation to be anointed

Tami: I would like to ask Pastor Karen and Pastor Jeff to move up front. The worship team wants to extend to you an invitation to be anointed. We are hoping this will be an opportunity for you to open your heart so that you might experience God's forgiving and healing presence. There will be two anointing stations up here on the outside ends of the communion rails. I will direct you to come forward much like we have done for communion. Both Karen and Jeff have anointing oil from Israel. You can choose either station, you don't have to go to the station closest to you. This might be a great way to connect with Pastor Karen during her last weekend on staff. Our pastors will make the sign of the cross with oil on your forehead or your hand, or you can ask for a non-touch blessing. Just let Jeff or Karen know which you prefer when you come forward. Again, your choices are forehead, hands or touchless.

As you wait for your turn and as you walk up to the rail, consider that you are Forgiven! Let go of any shame, fear or guilt you may be carrying today. God claims you as his own beloved child. Nothing can separate you from God's love. Allow God's love to empower you so that you might be Jesus Christ to the World.

Jeff and Karen: as you anoint or bless each person, feel free to say a phrase that is meaningful to you. Perhaps something like "You are forgiven, rejoice!" or "I bless you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" or "Accept the love and forgiveness of Christ" or "May you feel the healing power of our Holy God" or something like that. Let me know if you would like to use oil that you already have or if you would like to use the Rose of Sharon Blessing oil that I have. I will set a box of Kleenexes at each station if you would like to wipe your finger between each person.

Stacey and Brandon will be playing recorded music during the time of anointing. When I see the last person return to their seat, I will offer up a closing prayer as a cue to the Praise Team to come on up.

