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Spill the Beans
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Gathering with God *If you wish, light a scented candle if you have one, and say:*

We light this candle, the warmth of the Presence of God in our midst. Today, many candles are lit, in various homes - but the light is the same: Jesus is the Light of World and we remember this light during these times of darkness.

Prayer

Pray these words, silently or aloud. If with others, consider sharing the reading together.

What words shall we use this day
 in this hollowed out space of Holy Week,
 where their sound cuts deep into the dark,

and the noise of the world deepens,
 and we find silence is all we have
 to speak of you, and a love that curves the light
 towards this moment in eternity?

What words have not yet been written for this night,
 where wheat that makes bread, first has to fall,

and break, and turn towards dying, before the chance
 (and it is only a chance) of life?

Why does it come to this, O God, where life is about loss,
 and love hurts, and questions are all we can give you?

May we find new words to speak of you,
 silent words our souls know,

patient words the world does not have time for,

and let them grow in us
 broken as they are, yet full of hope:
 'grace', 'truth', 'trust',
 'longing', 'hope', 'love'.

These are the only words we know, and the only words we have.
 May they come to new life in us. Amen.

Reflection & Bible reading John 12:1-8

If you are able, watch the video reflection by David MacGregor at www.ssuc.org.au/devotionals, otherwise please read on for a the full text.

Have you ever experienced love that was over-the-top ... so incredible that you had to catch your breath... come up for air ... spend time taking it all in. Not just over the top extravagant but over the top sacrificial. The focus ... the need was 100% ... 150% on the recipient. I have. Two quick stories.

We were blessed with two of our three adult sons during my first ministry placement back in the late 1980s. Ministry was a blessing. The congregation were a blessing. Yet family life was a tough gig. No I'm not talking about relationships; anything like that. Just being parents to three young sons less than three years in age apart ... and with little family (particularly on Dale's side) around to help. More so, we were in a high-set manse on a busy street and with a rocky, bindii-eyed back yard right next to the church.

That's where the church kicked into gear. That's where the extravagant love came into play in beautiful measure. Some key folk offered some amazing help, one in particular. She's part of our Southside community these days. Child-minding, meals, house-cleaning, shopping and more were offered.



When Dale fell pregnant with our youngest, Nathan, the church, bless them, decided that this was not good enough ... the love needed to notch up an extra gear. And with Dale's mum now out from the States to help too, the church moved house for us, into a quieter suburban street still in the suburb. And they kept on showering us with love ... practical love ...sacrificial love. We will never forget that sort of love. Its love straight from the heart of God.

Another quick one. Dale and I were both part of a large, vibrant young adults home group at Indooroopilly long ago. We'd gather each week, we'd be involved in worship and mission work together, we'd solve the political problems of Queensland and beyond around the lounge room ... we're talking Queensland late 70s friends. We'd go to the movies together. It was not common to get back from a night together, go to Gary and Lynn's place, start solving the world's problems and then at midnight (yes, midnight) Lynn would make a fabulous batch of fresh scones w3ith jam and cream. Probably dog-tired herself, yet she showed love demonstrably ... practically ... sacrificially. We will never forget that sort of love. Its love straight from the heart of God.

Another story. This time from Jerusalem. 2000 years back. It's six days before the centuries-old Passover Festival and Jesus, Mary, Martha, Lazarus and the disciples are gathered together. They've shared a meal together, thanks to Martha's hosting. Listen to the story as it comes to us from the Gospel of John 12:1-8.

Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table. Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume. Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, "This perfume was worth a year's wages!¹ Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.) Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me." (Common English Bible)

Those present that day witnessed perhaps the most uncomfortable moment of their lives. Imagine their horror as Mary brings out a small bottle of incredibly expensive perfume and pours its contents all over the feet of Jesus. The beautiful perfumed smell wafts through that room. "How wasteful," they think, especially Lazarus. Yet the extravagance, the "over-the-to-ness" has barely begun. Mary bows down and wipes Jesus feet loving, devotedly, passionately with her. Women in those times did nothing of the sort. This is a shameless act, scandalous. Imagine a bit of "wink, wink, nudge, nudge" going on!

Mary pours herself out in multiple ways before the feet, literally, of the one she knows as Lord and God – God of compassion and mercy. You see, this is not only an act of sacrificial love; it's an act of mourning ... an act of deepest, demonstrable lament for Mary indeed knows what is ahead of Jesus, she mourns what Jesus will soon endure.

What Jesus will soon endure, out of a love beyond anything Mary can offer (profound though that is) for her, for humankind, for all creation. Mary is in a beautifully poignant way preparing Jesus for his death and burial ... she grieves openly. She shares in his suffering.

How we long to sit at like Mary at the feet of Jesus, as he faces Jerusalem, as he faces the Cross, to offer our all, to take in all he would offer us in mercy, forgiveness, hope and life. Let this day, whenever you are engaging with this, be one in which you "hit the pause button", when you take time to sit at the feet of the master, the Lord, the Saviour, as together, as distant from each other we perhaps feel at these crazy times, as we journey with him toward the cross.

We continue our Holy Week journey to the cross

Pray these words, aloud. If with others, consider sharing these words together.

With the fragrance of expectation,
the scent of loving b grace,
"the trace of hope amid the fear,
and the aroma of abundance
may we go in love today,
and know God's gift is always with us,
In Christ Jesus, our Lord

