

Last week we looked at Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. The younger son spends all of his inheritance. Many people mistakenly think that the word prodigal means *lost*; others think it means evil or immoral, it actually means *extravagant or excessive*.

So in the story as you remember the son wastes his inheritance by being excessive and extravagant. The father is the same, he welcomes this rotten son of his, extravagantly. The son just pretty much told the father he wished he was dead. He wasted half of the father's wealth, so what does the father do? Puts a ring on his finger, gives him a robe, probably the real nice fluffy kind.

Then throws a party with his best food. Some have said that Jesus' parable could also be called the prodigal father. Isn't that interesting. And remember the story was originally written down in greek and it doesn't say the prodigal son in the original. There was no title given. The title prodigal son was the title it received on later on.

If Jesus gives the parable in order to give a glimpse of the kingdom of God, a glimpse of God himself, what does it say about God and the way he works in the world?

Bishop Blackie is a character in Andrew Greeley's mystery novels. He is also called the "little Bishop". In one of his sermons the little Bishop compares God to a teenage girl an adolescent female.

He says and I'm paraphrasing, look at the universe that God created, if a man would have created it, the creation would be finite with just and only just what was necessary. Instead what we find when we look at the cosmos we see that it is extravagant, excessive, just like a teenage girl.

Look at the stars in the sky or look under a microscope. There appears to be no end to God's creation. No end to the expanding universe no end to the intricate details of creation. Everything is to excess. Bishop Blackie says God is an adolescent female who shows no signs of growing up.

I find that very interesting because last week I asked which character does Jesus want us to model our lives after. Doesn't Jesus want us to model our lives after the one who is extravagant and excessive with his love?

Which leads us to Mary. You remember Mary and Martha. They are the two sisters of Lazarus who Jesus went to visit. Remember how Martha was all upset because Mary was just sitting there at Jesus' feet while Martha was left to do all the work? Jesus is visiting them again and again Martha is left to do all the serving of the dinner.

This time however, Mary is not just sitting there, this time she is working. Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus had died and Jesus raised him from the dead. Martha was so overcome with appreciation and thankfulness that she took an ointment, a very expensive ointment, it is estimated to cost a years worth of wages and she poured it on Jesus' feet.

In Jesus' day at times a host would offer water and a towel for their guest to wash their feet. Remember there were no paved roads, just dirt and rocks. People just walked on the sandals and feet. No one was gelin.

The feet took a beating. Occasionally a host would offer some ointment to soothe their guests feet. The guest would wash their own feet and put the ointment on themselves.

Mary comes in with not just a little bit of ointment but a year's wages' worth. She doesn't give it to Jesus she pours it on his feet her self. What a mess it must have been. Then she wipes up the ointment. Can you picture the mess? She wipes it up with her hair.

Wiping up ointment with your hair would be pretty gross today. In those days a women's hair was her glory. Mary was risking damaging her hair, risking her glory.

Of course Mary was thankful for Jesus saving her brother, of course she was thankful. But a year's wages worth of ointment poured out, wiping it up with her hair. That is a bit over the top wouldn't you say? A bit extravagant? Excessive?

She didn't need to do that? She wanted to? We often try to make intelligent decisions. We try to figure out our needs and our means. We try to be intelligent rational people but we usually don't act on our needs we act on our wants. Mary didn't need to spend all that money on the ointment. It was probably all the money she had. She didn't need to do it, she wanted to do it. It was excessive, it was extravagant it didn't make sense but she wanted to do it.

How did Judas react to Jesus. He acted out of self interest. Was it wasteful to use all that expensive ointment, sure. But that wasn't really Judas' concern. He really wasn't concerned about the need of the poor. He wanted that money in the common purse because he was the treasurer, because he was stealing out of the common purse.

When you think of someone who has loved you in your life. When you picture them in your mind, do you see some one who measures their expressions of love? Do you picture them as someone who is considering their own self interest?

No one is perfect save Jesus, but when you experience someone who is excessive in their care and love for others seemingly not considering their own advantage, chances are, you have met a disciple of Christ.

If you have met a disciple of Christ then you've gotten a glimpse of God and the kingdom of heaven.

This gift of Mary's, Jesus tells us, turns out to be an anointing for his death. From here Jesus goes to Jerusalem.

And you know what's going to happen there.

The story continues and it's all about excessive extravagant love and self sacrifice poured out for his beloved, poured out for you.

Amen.