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Sacrifice and Offering

[John 12:1-11]

Peter Hiatt @ The Sanctuary Downtown

December 12, 2010

“With or Without You” – U2

*See the stone set in your eyes; see the thorn twist in your side
I wait for you
Slight of hand and twist of fate, on a bed of nails she makes me wait
And I wait without you*

With or without you

*Through the storm we reach the shore, you give it all but I want more
And I'm waiting for you*

*With or without you
I can't live with or without you*

And you give yourself away

*My hands are tied, my body bruised, she's got me with
Nothing to win and nothing left to lose*

And you give yourself away

*With or without you
I can't live with or without you*

That was kind of a weird, but appropriate offertory.

“Without You, I'm dead ... and with You, I'm asked to give myself away.”

This sermon is a continuation of last week's sermon; so if you missed it, you might want to give it a look online.

In John 12, Mary at Bethany sees the Savior and worships the Savior, dumping something like \$50,000 worth of perfume on His feet. When we worship, the fragrance fills the house and changes the world. “We are the aroma of Christ unto God,” writes Paul.

Mary worships the Savior and gives her life.

Judas wants to be the Savior, and takes the Savior's life ... and his own life.

Mary gives extravagantly, freely, and without limit. And, it seems to me, she's happy. It may not be your standard kind of happiness, but she's happy.
Acts 20:35 – Jesus said, "It's more blessed (literally, "happy") to give than receive."

This is the time of year when we talk about the joy of giving. It's Christmas, we're working on the new church budget, and it's always time to worship. And so, in December, preachers encourage you to give, so you can be happy. Give to be happy. But that kind of makes me grumpy.

- A. (*singing*) "It's the hap-happiest time of the year... there'll be much mistletoe-ing, and hearts will be glowing when loved ones are near..."

If it's the happiest time of the year, why is the suicide rate highest in December?
And have you been shopping? Did it make you happy?
This year, there's less to give, and you're trying to divide it between the kids.
And you have to give to friends, relatives, and co-workers.
So you're calculating:

What did they give last year,
so I'll know what to give this year,
in order to get a raise next year.

And then you think this to yourself:

"I can't wait for the holidays to be over... the hap-happiest time of the year."

- B. It's Christmas, and we're at church. And if I'm honest, most of the sorrow in my life has been directly related to giving my life at church.

And you know, church is family.

And so I bet most of your sorrow and pain is directly related to giving your life to family and to church.

I give my heart, and it's not received.

And if it's received, I brace myself for rejection.

And it is rejected, for it's never enough.

And then because I'm the Pastor, I'm supposed to make giving fulfilling for everyone else. I'm supposed to make church work.

And that makes me sad and grumpy.

- C. Actually, giving hurts.

Mary gave a year's wage. That hurt.

I've found that if I give \$1000, I usually have \$1000 less, and that's why it's called giving.

Paul writes, "People depraved in mind and deprived of truth imagine that godliness is a means of gain." (1 Tim. 6:5)

Mary gave, and it was a sacrifice... a loss.

Sacrifice.

Passover, death, worship, and fragrance... John 12 is a picture of sacrifice.

- D. Sacrifice hurts.

Jesus is the premiere sacrifice, the Passover Lamb, yet He also fulfills all the sacrifices in the temple of His body.

Jesus fulfills all the sacrifices, but that doesn't mean there are no more sacrifices.
For in fact, Jesus fulfills the sacrifices in us. We are His body.
Romans 12:1 – We are “present ourselves as living sacrifices.”
We don't sacrifice animals, but we sacrifice ourselves.
We tend to think that old stone temple was some sort of primate anthropological anomaly, but it's actually a blueprint for our lives.
We are the temple.

In Mary's day, worship in the temple consisted of sacrifice.
A sacrifice is a surrendered life... plant life or animal life.
American Evangelicals tend to think the sacrifices were only for taking away sin, and that's part of it... the sin offering carried sin. The sin offering and the scapegoat did that. The scapegoat was released in the wilderness, so the body of the sin offering was disposed of outside the city, where Jesus was crucified.

However, the Passover lamb was eaten in the city, and other sacrifices were eaten as communion in the Temple; and thus the sacrificial broken body became the worshipper's body.

The burnt offering (*Olah*) – like the daily lambs offered in the temple, like Noah's offering, like Abraham's offering – was entirely burnt up. (*Olah* means “to go up.”)

But the blood of all the offerings was thrown on the altar, on the people, even behind the curtain in the Holy of Holies. It went everywhere, and scripture says, “The life is in the blood.”

It's all fascinating, but too complicated to explain here... or actually, anywhere.
It's the judgments of God. We can't explain it, but we can get the picture.

When an Israelite worshipped...
Actually, when almost any primitive person worshipped...
(Because you see, sacrifice is almost like this universal human impulse... And Scripture's problem with sacrifice isn't the sacrifice itself, but to *whom* we sacrifice. And so the evil one tries to distort it and use it on other things.)

When an Israelite worshipped, he would bring an animal like this chicken.

[Peter holds up a whole chicken.]

I got this chicken from Safeway, but for an Israelite, it would be alive.
He'd bring it to the temple, lay his hands on it, symbolizing his connection to the offering, and then a priest would take a knife called the “*Makaira*,” and slay it and bleed it ... throwing the blood all around.

And hey, did you know Scripture says, “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged *Makaira*, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

[Peter starts cutting up the chicken on the altar while speaking.]

Well anyway, the priest would take the *Makaira* and “cut to the division of joint and marrow,” laying some pieces or all pieces on the altar. And there they would be received by the *Aionios Fire*... the Eternal Fire that came from God and was God, and the House of the Lord would be filled with the fragrance... the aroma... pleasing to God.

Well, Mary saw the sacrifice of Christ, and Mary sacrificed herself. I don't know about you, but sacrifice looks painful to me... painful, and yet Mary was in ecstasy. *Ekstasis*... “out of stasis” ... out of “normal” ... Mary lost herself.

In the words of J.R.R. Tolkien, “She went out to that region where pain and delight flow together, and tears are the very wine of blessedness.”

King David writes, “I was glad when they said, ‘Let us go to the House of the Lord’.” (Psalm 122) “One thing I ask, that I might dwell in the House of the Lord forever.”

When Mother Theresa came to Washington D.C., they asked her what she hoped to accomplish. And she said, “The joy of loving and being loved.” A reporter said that takes a lot of money, and she said, “No, it takes a lot of sacrifice.” Joy.

What do Mother Theresa, King David, and Mary know that I don't know?
And one other question:

All those sacrifices up in smoke before the curtain ... where did all those sacrifices go?
What does God do with all those chopped-up animals?

Did you know that even when Israel was the slaughter certain enemies, God called them *Cherem* – devoted, holy – to Him. They were sacrifices ... human sacrifices ... and where did they go?

Even the ones outside the city where Christ was crucified... where did they go?
What is on the other side of that curtain?

[Chapter 12]

Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”

In Mark's gospel, He says it this way:

“You get to give to the poor anytime you want.”

He says it like giving is happiness.

[next verse (9)]

When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

Get that? They try to kill Lazarus, because Jesus raised Him from the dead.

The religious leaders and Judas take life, like Eve took fruit from the tree in the middle of the Garden. They take life and they're dead. Mary surrenders her life, and she lives in ecstasy.

Judas takes and Mary gives.

Judas seizes control, and Mary surrenders.

Judas works, and Mary worships.

Judas keeps his life and is miserable, and Mary loses her life in ecstasy.

Judas takes his life ... he commits suicide.

Mary gives her life ... she is a living sacrifice.

Suicide or sacrifice.

We must choose one or the other.

We must take our life or give our life.

Mary gave, and the pain is consumed in joy.

What did Mary know, and how did Mary give?

Why was she happy?

Well, here are a few ideas:

1. She gave what she had.
Judas wanted to give what he didn't have and wasn't his to give.
What do you have?
It doesn't matter... it could be a bottle of perfume.
It could be 5 loaves and 2 fish.
It could be just a penny.
It doesn't matter.
See? I don't have to preach like Billy Graham.
Just preach what I have.
2. She gave all she had.
Not just perfume, but tears, hair, her very self thrown at His feet.
You are the sacrifice.
Give the laughter, and give the tears.
Give the fullness and give the emptiness.
Give the health and give the wound.

At the tomb, with her tears, Mary had given the wound: the loss of her brother, her disappointment in Jesus, her Savior. It's tempting to guard the wound, but Mary gave the wound. A body is joined at the wound. Mary gave all, Judas gave part. He calculated. He was a thief.

3. Mary knew she really "had nothing."
Her very life was a stewardship.
She witnessed Jesus raise her brother from the dead, and say, "I AM the Resurrection and the Life."
She didn't own her life.
Judas owned his life, and was a thief.
4. Mary gave to one person.
Judas said he wanted to give to many persons (the poor),
and so his gift would be divided.
I'm a pastor, a father, a husband, a son... and I go crazy trying to divide my life between so many. But what if I could give my life to just one person?
Mary gave what she had, and all she had to just one person.
She worshiped one person.

What if I could worship that one person in several different places?

Then I wouldn't ask, "What does Susan want, and Jonathan want, and Frances want, and Justin want and Andrew want? ..."

I'd ask, "What does Jesus want in each of these places?"

5. Mary gave without concern for what she got.
Exchanging gifts with adults can be a real drag.
But nothing is quite as fun as giving gifts to toddlers on Christmas morning.
When my kids were 3, 4, and 5, they had few illusions.
They had few illusions about earning a thing. It was all grace.
And my gifts (any gift – hot wheels, plastic...) just rocked their world.
I knew I wouldn't be repaid, but my gift would be received... so my giving was its own gift.
Giving to toddlers is its own reward.

Mary dumped all that perfume on Jesus knowing she wouldn't be repaid, or that she already was repaid ... with Jesus. She knew Jesus and worship was its own reward.

From Mark and Matthew we know that this gift rocked Jesus' world. He called it "beautiful," and declared it epic, and said she anointed Him for His burial.

Judas knew about Jesus and wanted His attributes, so when Jesus talked of death, Judas gave him up. Dead things don't have many attributes.

Judas knew **about** Jesus, and Mary **knew** Jesus ... and so she worshiped Jesus for who He was and is. When you worship "Jesus Christ and Him crucified," you worship Him for who He is:

Naked bleeding Love.

All the world will show up when He's passing out His gifts, but Mary shows up... His bride and mother show up ... when He's hanging on a cross. And she anoints Him for burial. She loves Him when He's good for nothing ... just good. Her worship is its own reward.

O. Henry, the famous novelist, wrote about a young couple. Jim, whose gold watch was his prized possession, and Della, whose beautiful long hair was her glory.

On Christmas Eve, Della shaved her head and sold her hair to buy Jim a platinum case for his watch. Meanwhile, Jim sold his watch to buy Della a set of jewel-studded, mother-of-pearl combs for her hair. That night, they exchanged gifts, and were happy. They gave all they had to the one they loved, without thought of gain.

O. Henry titles his story *The Gift of the Magi*. And that makes sense: Stupid wise men... they gave gold, frankincense, and myrrh to a toddler. And, it appears, they were all happy!

Well, Mary gave without thought of gain.

Think about it:

If you give in order to get, it's not giving... it's buying.

If you give in order to get, it's not sacrifice ... it's not worship.

So think about it:

"Happy are those who give."

But if you give in order to be happy, you're not giving, and thus you're not happy.

So, "Happy are those who give without thought of their own happiness."

Happy is Mary, who gave thinking of Jesus' happiness.

Happy are those who sacrifice because the aroma is pleasing to God.

Mary gave without thought of gain, yet ...

6. Mary knew that Jesus would receive everything given.

And maybe this is the most unhappy part about giving.

"You give and you give and you give yourself away..."

And people say "so what?"

They can't receive your gift... they don't see your heart.

Maybe that's happened here at the Sanctuary, or at House Church, or with the offering.

You give, and no one sees your gift or receives your gift.

Usually when I preach, I have an intense battle with shame; for usually I give my heart, and then I feel naked and ashamed. And that's not your fault... it's my fault:

I'm giving to the wrong person.

When you give at this church, I hope you never give to me. That's why I make it a point to never know what anyone puts in the offering plate. And that's why I get nervous thanking people for serving. Because if you think you're giving to me, you'll end up hating me, because I won't see your gift and receive your gift. You are giving to the wrong person.

Always, always, always give your gift to Jesus.

And in that way, you can give to the most ungrateful and cantankerous people with joy... for you don't give to them, you give to Jesus **in** them. And then, their very poverty and cantankerousness only increases the gift, as Jesus says, "Thank you for loving me in the temple of the last and least of these."

We sacrifice to Jesus, for He's already been sacrificed for us.

We give to Jesus, for He's already given everything for us.

We wash his feet, for He's already washed ours. (John 13)

Dee Dee Reinkie is our new business manager. (She's in charge of our money bag.)

And she and her husband Mark are also old friends.

Last week, after we talked about John 12 in staff meeting, Dee Dee called me and said,

"I think I'm supposed to tell you a story. Remember when things were really hard for me and Mark... when he was losing the business and I was always mad? Well, one day in prayer, Jesus told me that I needed to wash Mark's feet. I didn't want to. It killed me."

She didn't want to, but she wanted to do it for Jesus. She'd seen the sacrifice of Jesus, the Jesus who lives in the temple named Mark.

"So when he got home," Dee Dee said, "I told him the story, and I made him sit down. He didn't want to."

See? It was a sacrifice for Mark **and** a sacrifice for Dee Dee... a sacrifice given to Jesus, called the "Obedience of Faith."

"Peter, I told Mark to sit down and submit to Jesus. I started washing his feet. Then I let down my hair and washed them with my hair. I lost control. He started crying and I was crying. It was amazing. Something happened. It changed us and saved our marriage."

Two broken people become one flesh.

Each sacrificed their life and started to live... happy.

What is happiness, joy or pleasure?

Is it something that I myself can acquire and possess?

I read in one of Philip Yancey's books that there are no nerve endings for pleasure. I mean, there are nerves that sense heat, cold, pain, and touch... but pleasure is like a harmony system or dance. It's what a body feels when each part gives and receives sacrificially... not pain, pleasure.

Do you realize that each part in your body is constantly bleeding?

Each part is bleeding into the next part, circulating life. Happiness is life.

And Scripture says, "The life is in the blood."

Jesus told Mary (last chapter), "I AM the life."

Think about that!

Jesus said, "I AM the life."

The life.

That means whenever you use the phrase, "My life," you admit that you're a thief of life...

THE life.

And that is just what Scripture tells us:

In a garden long ago, and every time we sin...

we steal life from a tree;

we steal life and cut ourselves off from life, and so now are dead;

we steal happiness and cut ourselves off from happiness, and so now are sad.

See?

What if happiness isn't something I contain within myself, but something larger than myself?

What if life isn't something I contain within myself, but something larger than myself?

What if I'm not to be a body unto myself, but part of a body bigger than myself?

What if I'm not a body, but a body part cut off?

Then I may look alive, but in fact be dead.

What is this is life [**picture #1**]? Like a river all around me.

And this [**picture #2**] is "my life," my flesh?

I may think this is life, but if it's life cut off from life, it's damned... it's death... a body of death [**picture #3**], for it only feels its own pain and own pleasure. That's not real pleasure.

So, if I saved this life, I'd lose it... it's dead.

But if I lost this life, for the sake of Life [**picture #4**] ... if I was cut to the "division of soul and spirit... joint and marrow"... and if I communed with life, and Jesus is THE LIFE ... well, I might begin to life and be happy. I might sacrifice myself and experience the joy of the Lord.

Ecstasy... I'd be out of myself, lost in joy.

Now I know, sacrifice can be terrifying.

And we wonder:

What's on the other side of the curtain?

What's on the other side of the broken flesh?

What's on the other side of the altar, the other side of the tree... the cross?

Answer... every chicken that ever lived.

Every lamb, every bull, every goat ever sacrificed.

My dad.

Old relationships.

1st Presbyterian Church.

Lookout Mountain Community Church.

Everything and everyone I've ever been asked to sacrifice.

My life, your life.

The New Creation, which is the old creation filled with the fiery life of God...

And the Passover Lamb, risen from the dead.

Revelation 5:13 – John sees it and hears it... “Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is within them, praising the Lamb... Passover Lamb ...standing on the throne.”

I am literally dying to get there... and yet there is already here when we worship in spirit and in truth.

Let’s pray: “Father, in Jesus’ name, I receive your sacrifice of Love, and I present myself a living sacrifice. Fill me with Your Spirit, Your Life ... in Jesus’ name.”