Hospitality: At the Impulse of Love

Beloved community: I invite us to be together in a spirit of prayer. Holy Loving Spirit, we are grateful for the freedom to gather today on our live stream and on this land – loved by the Wahpekute Dakota and others throughout time and where we are now weaving our way of community. **We trust you to challenge and encourage us this morning as we wonder: how are we co-creating with spaces of true hospitality where we move nimbly at the impulse of your love?** We ask this all in the way of our great teacher, Jesus. Amen.

Throughout September, we have been exploring this theme of hospitality. **Earlier in the month, we heard the gospel story of that encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus.** And they invited us to understand hospitality as an orientation or posture of openness to our possible connections with one another. They showed us how, more than welcoming one another into particular places or activities, hospitality is fundamentally welcoming each other into being seen and known.

Last week, we heard the first century gospel story about a Samaritan crossing paths with a Jew at a point of immense need. We noticed how the Samaritan was "moved with compassion" - that is, moved to 'suffer with' his Jewish neighbor. And given the historical context of deep animosity between Jews and Samaritans, this was a move of radical hospitality – openness to seeing, approaching, and caring for the other.

Let's dive into our gospel story for today. As Mary Maren shared when introducing the reading, Jesus and his were making their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover – the feast of remembrance of their ancestors' deliverance from enslavement in Egypt. Days earlier, Jesus had been in the village of Bethany and miraculously revived Lazarus after he had been dead for several days.

The setting for today's story mingles gratitude with loving care. The siblings (Lazarus, Martha and Mary) host a dinner in Jesus' honor. When they heard he and his closest disciples were back in town, they could have acknowledged it by simply going out to hear him speak and exchange pleasantries with him, expressing their gratitude for his life-giving intervention for Lazarus.

But the impulse of love compelled them to lavish care on Jesus. We can understand how they likely wanted nothing more than for Jesus to feel their gratitude and to offer him an opportunity to witness Lazarus' return to good health.

I wonder what Mary was feeling and thinking in the moments before she knelt to anoint Jesus' feet. Did she wait for a natural break in the conversation? **Did she hesitate at all** – wondering if their gathered friends would respond in shock and tease her about her adoration of the rabbi? Did she hesitate with doubts as to whether she could go through with her intended expression of loving care? Did she take a deep breath?

Whatever barriers fear may have attempted to erect to block the way, the impulse of love was stronger. Judas was shocked by Mary's impulsive action. Let's be honest – wouldn't many of us have been shocked? Some but not all of us may have managed to mask our shock.

An impulse is a sudden strong urge to act. A few synonyms for impulsive are **audacious, lavish, and without hesitation**. During Connecting With The Word this past Wednesday, we discussed how some of us do not naturally roll as impulsively as others of us. Yet the capacity to act at the impulse love may have as much to do with nurture as it does with nature. Acting at the impulse of love is a practice.

As you listen to the following factors we lifted up as necessary for action at the impulse of love, I invite you to notice how they intermingle with the spiritual practice of hospitality – holding space for seeing and knowing the other more fully and being seen and known more fully.

Our readiness to act with the impulse of love will likely require one or more of these factors at diverse moments in our lives:

- To act at the impulse of love will feel **extravagant**.
- To act at the impulse of love makes **reaching out** necessary.
- To act on that impulse of love requires some **measure of confidence and surety**…
- …Enough that acting on the impulse of love is also **resisting fear**.
- To act on the impulse of love means we need to be able to **trust being direct.**
- In order to act on the impulse of love, we will need to be **determined** to show that love.
- Before acting on the impulse of love, we will likely need to **notice the need of someone** we are facing.
- While it can be scary to act on the impulse of love, it's possible when we have **built a foundation** (the start of a relationship) and then **commit to stay power**.
- And finally, we lifted up that acting on the impulse of love really makes **listening patiently** important.

Let's return to our gospel story. Even as Judas catastrophized – articulating potential loss to others at the hands of Mary's humble, generous, tender gesture, (and, again, let's admit that Judas is so relatable for many of us) Jesus names what had actually occurred: *"[Mary] bought [this perfume] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."*

In other words, let love flow. Express care now. Don't put it off until some uncertain future occasion.

Jesus' words about seizing the moment to express loving care transported me to a scene from the 1997 romantic comedy film *My Best Friend's Wedding.* Julia Roberts and Dermot Mulroney play best friends who share a soulful moment on a river cruise.

One says to the other: *"If you love someone, you say it, you say it right then, out loud. Otherwise, the moment just… passes you by."* The other has a word of affection on the tip of their heart, but they hesitate, the boat passed under the shadow of a bridge, they cast their eyes downward, and the moment was gone.

Mary didn't let the moment pass. We heard, *"The* ***house was filled with the fragrance*** *of the perfume."* How will we each fill our own homes, this house of worship with the fragrance of love?

Jan Richardson offers poignant words when it comes to pouring out love toward one another. She wrote, *"Open to it and you will know how love is its own blessing."* There she challenges us to not be so proverbially cross-armed across our hearts (protecting ourselves) but rather to open up whenever we dare.

She also says, *"Pursue it entirely with everything in you,"* and then quotes that ancient law of loving with all our heart, and our soul, and our mind. Really, love doesn't exist (it isn't experienced) outside of us embodying it.

And, finally, she says, *"Spend it all… this love that gives itself in lavish and unimagined measure everywhere and to all…"* What an encouragement to be generous with ourselves in loving ways.

As we each and together move further into this season of fall, may we strive to practice hospitality that creates space for being known and practice space-filling love that reminds us that we are all beloved. Amen.

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John 12:1-8, “Love is the Most Ancient Law”