

“JESUS FIRST”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: JOHN 12:1-8

GOD’S WORD: ISAIAH 16:21

I – PRIORITIES:

What are your priorities in life? We all have them. We may not have a written list or have given it much thought but we have them. Sometimes these priorities are very conscious and sometimes they exist in our subconscious. They control the way we think and act. They control what we do each day and sometimes each moment of that day.

Take a moment right now and think of what your priorities are and how you would rank them in the order they control your life. Maybe you even want to jot them down in your bulletin. There are many that clamor for our attention:

- WORK
- MONEY
- FAMILY
- FOOD
- HOUSING
- VEHICLES
- RECREATION

Just to name a few. You may have a lot of others to add to this list.

But we forget that the one priority that all the others come from. We forget to make sure God is at the top of our list. We go through each day and live our lives forgetting who gave us our lives to begin with. We don’t make him a priority until we need him. Until we get in trouble or our family falls apart, or our health goes to pot, or our jobs are downsized. Then we pray and call on him but as soon as the crisis is over we put him on the bottom of the list again. In a normal week we make him a priority for a couple of hours on Sunday but move him down the list the rest of the week.

II – ISAIAH:

This is the message I see in proclamation of Isaiah you heard read this morning. He speaks for God as he reminds them of the mighty acts God performed to bring them out of the slavery in Egypt. He takes them back and recalls how he parted the waters of the Red Sea so they could safely pass through and get to the other side as Pharaoh and his troops were bearing down on them. He led these troops into the same passage the Israelites had just taken and then he let loose the waters and drowned them so they were no longer a danger to his people.

But we know what happened. He delivered them and led them into the land away from their slavery but they turned against God and put a golden calf in his place and he spent time on the mountain with Moses. They whined that Moses should have left them in Egypt to die where at least they had food and water. How soon they forgot their priority.

But God tells them to forget all that. He says he is making a new way. He is doing something new. He has already begun this new work and it will be a blessing to them and others. Including the creation. Make God your priority again because he's the one who is at work to bless you!

III – TEXT:

In this morning's text I see a loud message from Jesus about our priorities. Let me share with you this lesson from the Gospel of John.

John 12:1-8 (NLT)

¹ Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. ² A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. ³ Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, ⁵“That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” ⁶ Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

⁷ Jesus replied, “Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

This is the final week of Jesus' earthly life. This is the week he will die. One of the things he does to prepare is to have dinner at the house of his friend, Lazarus, who he had recently raised from the dead, and his sisters Mary and Martha. Lazarus had probably secluded himself from the public since his resurrection because he was an item of curiosity...a spectacle. But his friend Jesus was in town and he came out of hiding to eat and visit with him.

They would have been reclining around the table on pillow as was the custom of the day and they had begun the meal when Mary came out carrying a jar of expensive perfume. A perfume that would have been imported from another land, and as the passage tells us was worth a years wages for the average worker of the time. She pours this perfume on his feet and the whole house is full of the scent/odor of the perfume. And then she wiped his feet with her hair.

Mary's actions were an offering of love and gratitude for what Jesus had done for her brother and for how he had saved her and her family from their sins and put them on the path of Salvation. Wiping his feet with her hair was a gesture of utmost devotion and reverence. Jesus was the priority in her life. No one or nothing came before him. He was the first and foremost and all else came after him.

But then we have Judas to contrast this to Judas who was a thief at heart. Somehow he had gotten himself elected to be the treasurer of the group and he took advantage of the position by skimming money from the treasury for himself. What he sees in Mary's act of devotion is a waste of money that could have went to further line his pockets. He doesn't have Jesus or anyone else but himself s the priority of his life.

Jesus knows that Mary is sensitive to his impending death and he defends her act of devotion. Her sense of priority.

I'll come back to that last verse in a moment.

IV – RESETTING OUR PRIORITIES:

So we have the example of Mary who is a faithful disciple and has given her all to Jesus. As we have the example of Judas who is an unfaithful disciple and has his own wants and needs in front of Jesus. The question becomes...what kind of disciple are you? Are you a Mary or a Judas? Is Jesus #1 or are you #1. Are you worried about the love of Jesus or are you to busy loving your money, your things?

This season of lent is the time to remember how much God loves you, how much Jesus did for you. Our world is broken...and we broke it. Our world is infected by sin and we are the ones who infected it. Our world sees more and more evil and we're the ones who carry it. God created it in perfection and because of us it has become a mere illusion of what it was meant to be. Every time we turn around we see another act of betrayal instead of devotion.

Yet God loved us so much that he did not wipe it all away and start over again as he did in the days of Noah. Instead he had a plan. He put on human skin and came to earth as his Son Jesus to live among us and feel the things we do. He remained above the fray of sinfulness and stayed perfect so he could be the sinless sacrifice as he became the "Lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world. He showed that we were his #1 priority as he set in motion his own death. He showed his love s he waited in the garden to be arrested, as he was tried on charges they made

up. He showed his love as he was beaten by the palace guards and then questioned by Pontius Pilate. His love continued to shine as he was turned over to the Roman soldiers who stripped him, mocked him, placed thorns on his head and then savagely beat him until his internal bones, muscles, and organs were visible. His love was evident as he was taken up the hill of Calvary, nailed to a wooden cross, and dying in the Middle East sun. But his love was maybe most evident that before he died he pronounced forgiveness on the very people who had nailed him to that cross. He forgave us! We are the cause of his misery, abuse, and cruel death. And yet his actions saved us from the same fate and grants us not only forgiveness for our sins and brokenness but also from the penalty of death.

For that he is deserving of our most lavish acts of devotion, respect, hospitality, and gratitude for what he's done for us. I may not be able to wipe his feet with my hair but I can certainly love him above and beyond anything else in this life. I can make him the #1 priority in my life here until he fills the spot for me in heaven. How about you?

V – CHURCH PRIORITIES:

And now for that last verse:

⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

I see in this verse a statement about priorities in the church as well as in our personal lives. I see the message that Jesus is 1st and ministry is 2nd.

We will always have something to do. As long as we are in this broken world there will always be people in need. People who hurt, people who are broken, people who are hungry, people who can't afford to live healthy, people who are addicted, people who are unloved, people who are bullied, people who are taken advantage of, people who have broken homes and families, people who can't get dressed, and the list goes on and on. We'll sum it up and say there will always be people in need, not only of material needs but of spiritual needs as well. And it's us the Church of Jesus Christ who are called to share his love with them.

But to do this we must make sure Jesus is #1. In the modern world religion seems to focus on what is useful, practical, and cost effective. What we need to do is make sure we realize that Jesus is worthy of our biggest and most precious assets.

And we need to make sure he is the priority over the programs. Are we doing it for him...or are we doing it for us?

Is Jesus #1 in your life and in your church?

AMEN