



Living and Sharing the Gospel

Weekly bulletin

March 15, 2020

GCI worship services have been cancelled to the next three weeks—for the rest of March. You will be kept updated as we receive instructions from the GCI head office in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

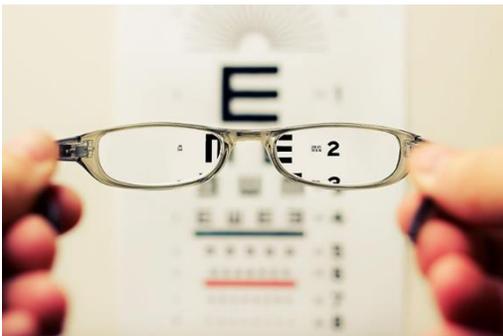
If you have a prayer requests, other events you would like to announce and/or praise to our great God you would like to share, please contact Mr. Vautour by either email or telephone. Contact information is at the bottom of this bulletin.

Certainly, we all need to realize, during this time of crisis, that even if situations appear bleak and evil appears strong, God is still the ruler yet. Jesus sustains all things we are clearly told in Colossians. We could not be in more loving hands! Although we may go through temporary troubles, we have to always keep in mind the hope we have in Jesus.

We need to pray for our civil leaders, those in high positions as well as Christian religious leaders to give appropriate leadership as we traverse difficult periods. God tells us to pray for all people and to do good to everyone especially those of the household of God.

Vision

March 4, 2020



Mr. and Mrs
Greg Williams

Dear Church Family,
Most of us are familiar with the wise saying in **Proverbs 29:18** – ***Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. (KJV)***
In the more modern interpretation of Eugene Peterson it says this:
If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend

to what he reveals, they are most blessed. (MSG)

Vision is incredibly important. None of us want to stumble all over ourselves or even worse, to perish.

Grace Communion International's vision is "Healthy Church." We began this journey when I became President in October 2018. We arrived at this part of our journey based on the miraculous works that the Lord had been performing in us for over two decades.

God has gifted GCI with:

1. His amazing grace as he brought us out of the shadowlands of the old covenant into the glorious light of Jesus and the new covenant that he ratified by shedding his blood.
2. Revealing to us the significance and depth of his triune nature. We have come to learn that the doctrine of the Trinity is the crown doctrine from which all other beliefs flow. The "one and three" Father, Son and Spirit are relational and have drawn us into loving, eternal communion.

3. A stream of renewal to live out of this grace and communion as Healthy Church. It is our vision to become the healthiest expression of the church of Jesus Christ that we can be.

Some have observed that this vision is inwardly focused. This is mostly true. In our ongoing journey with Jesus we are seeing the need to become more focused and improved on how we worship, how we include newcomers, and how we grow deeper in our commitment to Christ and strengthen the fabric of our church family. Healthy church needs some inward focus so we are better prepared for outward focus.

I equate our season of focus and improvement to what it is like when we invite another couple over to our home for an evening dinner and entertainment. What goes into the preparation? We straighten the house and vacuum the carpets. There is intentionality in planning the menu. Do the guests prefer fish or beef? Do they have any special dietary needs? Would they like wine with dinner? Perhaps this will be an occasion to light candles and play background music. Would they enjoy playing a card game or watching a movie? Do you see how the planning details grow as you focus on the quality of the event and what the experience will be like for your guests?

During the years following the grace awakening of GCI, there was quite a lot of struggle. Not all members made the journey from the old covenant to the new covenant. Not all pastors were able to negotiate the changes. The high volume of leadership changes and the downsizing of our congregations created a dynamic that is best described as survival. As we settled into the "newness" of who we now were, the attention to the details on how we present ourselves as a church had waned. While we rejoice in having the incredible gifts of the New Testament gospel and the supreme doctrine of the Trinity, our means for how we live and share this has become worn and tattered.

Our congregational meetings and meeting spaces need attention. Is our hall clean and inviting? Is there ample parking and clear signage to get into the building? In what shape are the restrooms? Do we start our services on time and do they follow a meaningful and worshipful flow? If your Sunday service feels more like an informal small group gathering in someone's living room, then attention is needed (small groups have their place, but the Sunday worship service needs planning, preparation, and intentionality in focusing on Jesus).

What is a first-time visit like for a guest to your church? Is there an order of worship outline that they can easily follow so they know what is going on? Is it easy to find childcare services or youth meetings? Is there an up-to-date information center with clear communication pieces that help a new person navigate what services are offered by the church? Is the congregation friendly and inclusive so that the newcomer feels like there can be a place for them in this church family? Will there be a new believers class available to them in a timely fashion? If we desire for guests to become members, then we must be mindful of clear pathways for this to happen.

Beyond sharing a weekly worship service, what is the fabric of the fellowship of your congregation? Is there sharing in how relationships are being nurtured and deepened? Is the gift of hospitality alive in your membership? Do members break bread in one another's homes, and include the neighbors? Does your church host annual picnics, campouts, and other events? When was the last time the church gathered to do a service project? This project could be beautification of the church property, serving the needs of the widows, or assisting a need in the surrounding target community of your church.

For me, the renewal stream that began in 1995 is continuing 25 years later, and the vision is clear. The Lord is beckoning us to more fully join him through the leadership of the Spirit. He is calling and empowering us to become the vibrant lighthouse in the neighborhoods where our churches are located. It is time for GCI to rise up and become the Healthy Church the Lord wants us to be.

Moving Forward Together!

Greg Williams

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS: GOOD NEWS IN AN ALABASTER JAR (MATTHEW 26)

(From: <https://www.gci.org/articles/good-news-in-an-alabaster-jar/>)

Matthew 26 records an interesting episode in the life of Jesus, just two days before he was killed. This was an action-packed week, filled with highly significant events — and this event is

no exception. In Matthew 26, we find a description of Jesus being anointed with perfume. The story begins in verses 1-2:

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away — and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." (NIV 1984)

Jesus knows that his time is short — he has only two days to live — but his disciples seem to be unaware of it. Jesus will soon be given another opportunity to tell his disciples about his impending death. Then there is an abrupt change of scene, in which Matthew tells us what is happening in another place at about the same time:

The chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." (verses 3-5)

Jesus anointed with perfume

Matthew then takes us back to Jesus:

While Jesus was in Bethany [two miles east of Jerusalem] in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. (verses 6-7)

A whole jar of perfume! The smell would have filled the entire room.

When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."

Then Jesus, with special emphasis, said,

I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her. (verses 8-13)

Why is this so important?

I would like to ask a follow-up question: Why is this story so important that it will be told wherever the gospel message goes?

The woman had done a nice favor for Jesus, and it was appropriate for Jesus to thank her in a nice way. But surely this does not mean that the disciples, no matter where they went in the world, would have to tell this story everywhere they told the gospel? If the disciples were running short of time, couldn't they just preach the gospel and skip this particular story? No, said Jesus. Wherever the gospel is preached, this story must be told, too. It is practically as important as the gospel itself!

When the disciples were inspired to write the stories of what Jesus did, they also wrote the story of what this woman did. In the Gospel accounts, it is on an equal level with the teachings and miracles of Jesus. What this woman did is an essential part of the story of Jesus. That is not just long ago and far away. It also applies right now, and right here. Wherever the gospel goes, this story must be told, too. Why is that?

The context: Jesus' death

This section of Matthew is about Jesus' death. It begins in verse 2 with Jesus mentioning his death. It moves in verse 3 to the conspiracy to kill Jesus. And in verse 12, Jesus connects the anointing with his burial.

Right after Jesus says that this story will be told around the world, Matthew tells us in verse 14 that Judas went out and conspired with the chief priests to betray Jesus. This anointing with perfume was the last straw for Judas. He was so upset about this waste of money that he went out to betray his master for 30 pieces of silver — ironically, money that he himself would waste.

He eventually saw that there was something more important than money – but that is a different story. Our focus today is on the story of what the woman did. That is the story that must be told everywhere the gospel goes.

The story is set in the context of Jesus' death. It is part of the introduction to what is called "the passion" – Jesus' suffering and death. That helps make the story significant. There are several points of resemblance between what this woman did and what Jesus did on the cross. Her action was in some ways a parable, a drama that portrayed spiritual truth about Jesus. Many of Jesus' own actions were object lessons for spiritual truths. He did many more miracles than could be recorded in the Bible, but some are reported to us because they have special significance.

The miracle of feeding 5,000 people, for example, helps show that Jesus is the bread of life. Just as he gives food for physical life, so also he gives what we need for eternal life. The fact that he could do something we can see, gives us assurance that he can do something we cannot see. Just as he heals diseases, so also he forgives sins. The physical action pictures a spiritual truth.

This is also true of what this woman did for Jesus. What she did illustrates for us some lessons about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It also pictures the way that we should respond to Jesus. What this woman did is a miniature picture of the gospel. That is why this story is so important that it has become part of the gospel message. It can help us explain the nature of the gospel.

A powerful devotion

Let's give this woman a name. John 12 tells us that she was Mary, sister of Lazarus, and that this was shortly after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. The story can be told without that particular fact — the action is more important than the name of the person who did it — but it does help us understand a little more of what went on behind the scenes. (It is not certain that the story in John 12 is the same incident as we read about in Matthew 26, but that question does not affect the point we wish to make here.)

We'll look at three ways in which this anointing resembles the sacrifice of Jesus himself.

First, Mary was motivated to do this out of love. Nobody told her to do it. It was not commanded. It was just something Mary took upon herself to do, and she did it out of love. Jesus also made his sacrifice out of love. He had no obligation to die for us, but he chose to do it, willingly, motivated by love. Even while we were sinners, he loved us with incredible intensity.

Mary may have known that Jesus was soon to die, but perhaps not. The disciples didn't understand that Jesus was going to die, and Mary probably didn't, either. Otherwise, she would have saved the perfume for the actual burial. She seems to have poured the perfume on Jesus simply because she had an incredibly intense devotion to Jesus. She was overwhelmed with love. Maybe it was a response to the resurrection of Lazarus.

Mary may have bought that perfume to anoint the dead body of her brother. Now that Lazarus was alive, Mary did not need the perfume for him — thanks to what Jesus had done. How could Mary thank Jesus for his wonderful gift of life? Why, she could use that same perfume to lavish it on Jesus, as a token of her thanks and love. Mary was praising Jesus, honoring Jesus—in effect, worshipping Jesus, sacrificing to Jesus.

Many people today are concerned with right beliefs. Right beliefs are good. We need them. Many people today are concerned with right behavior. Right behavior is good. We need it — but we need something else, too, and that is something that Mary demonstrates for us. Mary shows us right emotion, right feeling. The heart we need for God is an intensely personal devotion, a powerful dedication of ourselves to his service.

This intensity of emotion is unusual, and like most unusual things, this was criticized. This kind of devotion was not within the ordinary range of acceptable behavior. People would call Mary eccentric, maybe even out of her right mind. Society says, Don't get carried away with your emotions. Mary did. Her society criticized her, but Jesus praised her. Society says, Moderation in all things. Mary was not moderate. Her society criticized her, but Jesus praised her. The jury of 12 men said this is wrong, but Jesus said, she is better than you all.

Mary had an intense affection and devotion for Jesus. We can see it when she sat at Jesus' feet listening to him teach. She was a contemplative person who liked to think. Here, she is an expressive person — expressive not in words but in actions. Her quiet nature did not prevent her from making a powerful statement — more powerful than words could have possibly done. An enormous sacrifice

The second way in which Mary's action was like the sacrifice of Jesus is that it was a sacrifice. This was some incredibly expensive perfume. Mary could have sold it for a large amount. Mark tells us it was worth about one year's wages — the amount of money that a working person would earn in an entire year. In today's economy, it would be worth several thousand dollars. Can you imagine one bottle of perfume that costs several thousand dollars? Now, can you imagine just pouring it out? Thousands of dollars evaporating into thin air — gone forever. A year's worth of work, gone, just like that.

This shows us something of the intensity of Mary's love for Jesus. She must have known what she was doing, and how much it had cost her, but she did not care. Her love for Jesus was so great that she was not concerned about the cost. She was probably happy about it — she was getting a chance to demonstrate her devotion to Jesus. If she had sorrow, it was not about how much she was giving up, but that she had so little to give. Love often expresses itself in self-sacrifice, with little thought for self.

If an offering is to be meaningful, it should cost us something, and it should be done out of our own free will. We should give up something that is of value to us. Worship always involves sacrifice — sacrifice of money, time or pride, or all three. Maybe it requires everything we have, and everything we are. The disciples were concerned with self. They wanted to be great in the kingdom of God. But Mary was achieving greatness already, through her devotion to Jesus. She was not concerned for self and what she would get out of it. She was concerned for nothing but Jesus, and in that, she was already great.

Concern about the money

The disciples suggested that the money could be given to the poor. It wasn't just Judas who objected to this "waste" of money. All the disciples were indignant. It is good to give money to the poor. The traditional Jewish understanding of righteousness included giving money to the poor, and apparently the disciples sometimes did it. (When Judas went out from the last supper, the disciples thought that he might be going to give something to the poor. If Jesus had never given any money to the poor in the previous three years, the disciples probably would not guess that he would start right then. Charity seems to have been part of what they normally did.)

When someone has lots of money, it is appropriate to share some of it with those who need it. That is a good use of money. But in this case, Mary had picked an even better use of the money. She used it in an act of tremendous devotion, an act of worship. That is a legitimate use of money, too.

Some Christians make a religion out of social activism, and they do it very well. Social work can be part of the Christian faith. But some unfortunately see that as the only form of religion, and they have forgotten about devotion to Jesus. Social work is good, but it is not supreme. Jesus is supreme — and our devotion to him will cause us to help the people who need help. It's a

question of priorities, and Jesus must always be first. For Christian service to really count, it must be done for Christ. We are serving him. Even when we are helping other people, we are serving Christ.

What Mary did, from an observer's perspective, was a big sacrifice. But because she was willing, it was for her a small price to pay, a token of her love. Jesus' crucifixion, from all perspectives, was a tremendous sacrifice, but he was willing to make it. For the joy set before him he endured the cross. He knew that glory was waiting not just for him, but for all who would be saved by what he did. He was willing to pay the price—and he was happy that he was able to pay the price, because he knew how valuable the result would be.

As we grasp the enormity of his sacrifice, we cannot help but respond in love and devotion — and there is no sacrifice too great. Nothing we do could ever compare to what he has done for us. Our love for him causes us to live for him, to give all that we are.

Extravagant sacrifice

The third way in which Mary's action was similar to Jesus' crucifixion is that it was extravagant. It was far more than what was necessary. It was outrageous! Mary was not a calculating person who thought, what is the least I can do? How much do I have to spend to be enough? What is my duty?

Nor was she tied down to tradition. Mary did not think, How do other women show respect for a rabbi? She was not afraid of public opinion. Her love freed her from that fear. She was not afraid to do something out of the ordinary. Mary did not ask the disciples if it was OK. No, Mary broke traditions. She broke the limits of what is public propriety. Mary didn't even ask Jesus if it was OK. She just seized the opportunity, and did it. She did what she could, because only that expressed her devotion to Jesus. Her love was so great that it called for an exceptional act of creative devotion.

The disciples didn't object to the anointing in itself. They didn't object to perfume, but they objected to the extravagance. This was too much of a good thing — way too much. This was ridiculous, wasteful, even sinful. No so, said Jesus. What she has done is a beautiful thing. It had an aesthetic value, like a beautiful work of art, a beautiful piece of music. It was a beautiful action — a beauty that defies cost analysis. It is impossible to put a price on such personal devotion.

Sometimes we are too concerned about the usefulness of something. I often think that way. But that may mean that I do only the ordinary things, never the unusual, never the beautiful, never anything heroic, never anything requiring faith.

The disciples wanted the money to be put to good use, for something practical, like food for the hungry. That is a very good use for money. It was the ordinary thing to do, the normal thing to do, even a respectable thing to do. But usefulness is not the most important thing in the universe. Usefulness is not our god. Efficiency is not our god. Public opinion is not our god. Traditional boundaries of politeness are not our god. Jesus is our God, and it is useful to use up our material resources to honor and glorify him.

Maybe there aren't any tangible results, but a sacrifice of love and devotion has a usefulness of its own. An act of great beauty has a usefulness of its own when it is done for Jesus Christ.

Mary's act of extravagant waste was actually a picture of spiritual beauty — a heavenly fragrance. It pictured the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in a way that words could not. It was extravagant, and that is part of its beauty. God himself is extravagant.

When something is done out of the ordinary, someone is going to complain about it. Someone is not going to understand the motive, or understand the beauty, or they are going to say, "That's not right. We don't do things that way." To them, it seems that mediocrity is better than intense emotion. But Jesus praises extravagance, not mediocrity.

God gave us an extravagant gift in the person of Jesus Christ. It was an outrageous gift, worth far more than what we deserve. Grace is extravagant. Jesus gave everything he had for us. He gave his life. He gave more than necessary — he died for the whole world, and yet the whole world does not accept him. He died even for the people who reject him.

What a waste!, some people might think, but it was really an act of love, of sacrifice, of extravagance. Some people said, "That can't be right. That's not the way God normally acts with us." But God does things out of the ordinary. Jesus shows us total commitment, total sacrifice, so that we might respond to him with all that we have.

An extravagant response

We need to respond to Jesus the way Mary did — with a supreme focus on him, a single-minded love that counts everything else loss for Jesus Christ, a love that does not ask how little we can do to get by, a love that is not worried about public opinion, a love that is no longer concerned about what is within the boundaries of normal devotion — a love that is willing to be extravagant.

When Mary poured perfume on Jesus, she was not only picturing some aspects of what Jesus did on the cross, she also pictured the way that we should respond to Jesus, with such complete devotion, such willingness to sacrifice, such willingness to go beyond the boundaries of normal and to have an extraordinary love for Jesus.

Have you ever done anything extravagant for Jesus Christ? Have you ever done anything so outrageous for him that other people thought you were foolish? Have you ever been so bold with love that other people have criticized what you did? Some of us have. Maybe it was a long time ago. Whenever it was, it was sweet-smelling aroma offered to God.

The example of Mary tells me that I am too reserved. I am too often concerned with what others think. I am not loving Jesus as much as I ought. I am too concerned with myself. I need to think more about actions of extraordinary beauty. God has been extravagant with me. He has lavished on me the riches of his grace. He has repeatedly given me things I did not deserve and things I did not appreciate the way I ought. His grace toward me abounds and abounds and abounds. How do I respond to him who gave his life for me?

Author: Michael Morrison

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—www.gci.org, www.worshiphim.ca, www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton; For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website.

Contact Information: Pastor's contact information: email— evautour47@outlook.com