**11th Sunday in Pentecost—Year B—August 12, 2012—Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Matthew 26:6-13 written By Vicar Jimmy Roecker**

**Jesus Motivates Giving—1) Trusting him to provide 2) Flowing from faith**

Motivation. It’s the driving force behind every Olympian at this year’s London games. Every athlete has the drive, determination and motivation to win their event’s gold medal. This mindset was instilled at a very young age, some only 5 or 6 years old. Missy Franklin and Michael Phelps showed that motivation in the pool. It showed itself in the USA women’s gymnastics team. These men and women were motivated to put in all the hard work to stand victorious on the medal podium. They got the gold, an immediate reputation and endorsement deals left and right.

But think about this quote from former ULCA coach John Wooden. “Material possessions, winning scores, and great reputations are meaningless in the eyes of the Lord, because He knows what we really are and that is all that matters.” Having 18 gold medals is quite the accomplishment, but they have no lasting value, no eternal value. Personal records won’t matter either. That great reputation only lasts on earth. They were motivated to give their best on the world’s stage.

In the lesson for today, we’ll take a closer look at a woman and her motivation to give Jesus the very best. She gave him the best because Jesus motivates giving. We trust

**Jesus Motivates Giving: 1) Trusting him to provide 2) Flowing from faith**

Jesus and his disciples were making their way toward Jerusalem. The previous section said why he was doing this. The Passover was coming up, but he also told his disciples—the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified. Jesus knew full well what was being prepared for him in the coming weeks. But, it was a long journey, so he stopped along the way to visit friends. Jesus was in the city of Bethany, just about two miles from Jerusalem. Bethany was also the hometown of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

During his time in Bethany, Jesus and company had been invited over for dinner by Simon the Leper. Simon probably had met Jesus before. Maybe Jesus healed this former leper, but we can’t say that for sure. But what we do know is that the Pharisees came to a breaking point. They wanted to get rid of Jesus, so they decided to arrest him after the Passover.

As everyone took their place at the table in Simon’s house, **a woman came to him [Jesus] with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume.** More than likely, no one anticipated what she did next. **She poured [it—perfume] on his head…**The aroma filled the entire room. There’s no chance anyone missed what had happened. Some spoke their minds about it. The disciples voiced their concern. They were very displeased, even angry. **“Why this waste?” they asked.** The poor could have used the money if it was sold. To them, precious dollars were thrown away as it poured down Jesus.

Really, there was no hint whether the woman’s actions were pleasing, or if the disciples were right to question her actions. We do get the sense this woman wasn’t worried that the perfume was expensive. She simply trusted Jesus to provide everything she needed.

From the book of John, we know this woman was named Mary. She had previously sat at Jesus’ feet, taking in every word he said. And her sister, Martha let worry get the best of her. Preparing a meal had been more important to her than what Jesus had to say.

Mary’s actions were truly special. The perfume she used was very expensive and precious. It would be valued today around $40,000 or more—an entire year’s salary! Her act was a generous one for sure. In Jesus’ day, what she did was reserved for the guest of honor. Certainly Jesus was such a guest. But, the disciples couldn’t understand why Mary would do it. Judas was the disciple who spoke up against her. In his mind, her action was wrong, even getting angry about it. His suggestion to give the money to the poor may have been a cover for his own greed. The money seemed to be the only thing on his mind. He needed the security blanket of wealth.

How often don’t you wrap yourself in a security blanket other than Jesus? What types of things make you feel secure? Is it friends in high places, the new I phone 5 or the numbers in your savings account? Why do these things bring “security?” You can fall back on those friends for a favor. The I phone 5 will make everyone without it jealous; it beefs up your sinful nature. Saving up money for yourself feels good; after all you need it for just about everything in this life.

Worldly speaking, you have all the confidence and security you need. Building up all this “stuff” makes you feel pretty good. And you got it by yourself. Life’s all figured out. You can sit back and enjoy life. But, there’s a problem. Notice what’s not mentioned. There’s only trust or security in material possessions. What good is that? Well-known friends can’t take your sin away. Having an I phone 5 doesn’t make you a better person. Your solid bank account surely won’t guarantee you salvation. Verses eighteen and nineteen of Psalm 49 say—**Though while he lived he counted himself blessed—and men praise you when you prosper—he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life” (Psalm 49:18-19).** Being blessed in the world’s eyes does you no good. With that alone, you will never experience the glory of heaven. You will only feel the depths of darkness in hell.

Jesus has removed your sin, even the sin of soaking all your trust in material things. Mary brought an extravagant gift to Jesus, but Jesus provides you a gift far more extravagant. Very shortly, Jesus would be arrested and taken before the high priests and elders to be sentenced. His sentence would be death. He knew it was his Father’s plan to save you and me. Jesus went through hell itself on that cross. His blood destroys all of your sins. Jesus provided the sacrifice needed to make you at peace with God.

Jesus does provide everything you and I need. He’s by our side, providing protection from the evil one. He provides hope for eternal life with him. He provides all we need for our daily lives. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, he says—**put your hope in God, who richly provides us with everything (1 Timothy 6:17b).** He also promises to be with us. Hebrews chapter thirteen says—**Keep your lives free from the love of money…because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).** Our God knows what we need and will give it to us at the proper time. He will always be with us.

Every single blessing is provided by Jesus. He provides for you and me richly and daily. We know Jesus promised to do this. And, we give good gifts back to him. We are moved to do so because of his saving work. Our giving flows from faith. We see this is in our story this morning.

Jesus was aware of the disciple’s reaction to Mary. He wasn’t too pleased. He said—**Why are you bothering this woman?** Remember, the disciples were angry about the wasted perfume. They couldn’t understand why she had done it. Then, Jesus counters their bad attitude. **She has done a beautiful thing to me.** They would not always have Jesus around to give gifts to. But the poor would always be around. Mary’s action prepared her Lord for burial. Her actions would also be remembered wherever the gospel is preached.

You and I aren’t pouring perfume on people when we’re at their house for dinner. Yet, you can also do beautiful things to honor Jesus. You can share Jesus to those who don’t know him. You can volunteer your time and abilities to serve the church. Your actions glorify God.

The woman’s actions were what got all the attention. Matthew and Mark don’t even mention her name. Her actions flow from a heart of thankfulness for something Jesus hadn’t done yet. Her actions flow from faith. When you serve with your time, talents and treasures, you do as Mary did. You aren’t seeking glory, but are serving out of thanks to Jesus. You volunteer all these things to give glory to God.

Is your giving always to the glory of God? You’ve invested so much of your time. Enough is enough. You feel you deserve special recognition. You might think, I’ve got tons of ability that will help out, but they have to come to me. I’m not going to put myself out there. Or, I give so much to this church. I shouldn’t be taken for granted. I should get a plaque for my good giving. Your selfish pride fills your heart with these ideas of recognition.

When you’re connected to Jesus, everything changes. Jesus provided what is lacking in your sin of pride, your want for recognition, and your lack of contribution to his work. How does he do that? What does it mean for you? When you’re daily in his word, you see Jesus’ richest promises. You can see the blessings he showers on each one of us. And, you know his great love. Ephesians chapter five—**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2).** Jesus provides a sweet smelling sacrifice to cover our foul sins.

Then, you can’t help but faithfully give back to God. This happens through faith, through knowing how much God loves you. You give faithfully, whole-heartedly, and generously as the Lord has blessed you. You will then be a cheerful giver. Then you will find ways to give to the Lord, not just through offerings, but through your time, talents and abilities. Your actions will surely glorify God. Your new self in Christ will always move you to give because it’s what you want to do. You will be this way because that’s how God made you to be.

As hard as Olympians train, they can be distracted. Pressure to get the gold can be too much sometimes. Social media can get the best of them too. So much can divert our attention away from Jesus. Our sin of pride and desire for recognition smell foul to God. But, his fragrant offering covers over them. We have been made alive in Jesus, through the blood he shed. The blood he shed on the cross. His love motivates us to give good gifts, our very best. We know Jesus will provide. We know those gifts flow from our faith. Jesus Motivates Giving. Amen.