

“When the Lord restores and does great things,
may we rejoice and reap with shouts of joy.”
AMEN!

It wasn't long after becoming a pastor that I met Olga.

During that first meeting I learned that,
her husband of over 60 years,
had died about 8 years prior.

She had just sold her home and was
moving into an addition that her son and
daughter-in-law had built for her.

She was thankful that she didn't have
to relocate very far, see, her son lived
right there in the same neighborhood.

As we got to know each other that afternoon,
Olga then let me know she wanted
to make a donation to the church.

She wanted to give 10% of the profit
she collected on the sale of her home.

It was a generous offer.

Messiah Lutheran had just called their new pastor

and funds were pretty tight.

It was a tremendous gift of encouragement
from God that came through Olga to the church.

Then, she informed me that she was diagnosed
with something a few months prior to
my arrival at Messiah.

She said, she had tried to go
through with the treatment, but that
it was just too harsh and she chose to stop.

“I’ve thought long about this and prayed, too.
God’s okay with me making this choice.”

She stopped there and we let
the words linger in our quiet. (Pause)

A few days later, a couple people expressed
their concern that the new pastor
had “allowed Olga,”
to give such a large amount of money
to the church, in her condition.

“She was going to need that money,” they said,
“the pastor should not take advantage of Olga,
in her fragile state,” they said.

I was new, so I considered what they were saying.

Then I recalled the conversation I'd had with her,
and realized immediately that Olga was
NOT in a "fragile state."

She was in a most clear and
strong state of mind; determined.

She wanted to pour out an excessive gift
upon Messiah, the church she loved.

Sometimes the change which comes over
people when the Holy Spirit is working with them
challenges the values of others. (Pause)

Enter into the home of Mary,
Martha, and Lazarus (the one whom Jesus
raised from the dead).

Mary overwhelmed with gratitude and awe,
over what Jesus had done finds herself,
once again, at the feet of her Lord.

Once again, because that's where she was
when she knelt at Jesus' feet and said,
"Lord, if you had been here,
my brother would not have died."

In that setting, amid deep despair she
poured out tears at Jesus feet.

Grief and perhaps a bit of anger, too,
because Jesus took so long to get there.

Now, in her home, she's overwhelmed
with gratitude and awe, again, at the
feet of Jesus.

She poured out a whole pound of
very expensive perfumed oil onto Jesus' feet.

Mary's is the true nature of true faith.

Like Olga, determined and clear.

A faith that always seeks to give away and
to share with thankfulness for
all God has done. (Pause)

Did Jesus take advantage of her "fragile state?"

Could she have sold the anointing oil
for money to take care of herself and her family?

Her display of excessive wastefulness
is always disturbing to those who have not
been liberated from the world's idols.

It's shocking to those who've not yet
welcomed the serendipitous and
exuberant nature of God,
into their lives.

That's why Judas said what he said.

"Don't waste that!

We could have sold it to give it to the poor.
Don't waste it on Jesus' feet!" (Pause)

He said it, but we can't be angry at Judas,
for we do and think the same things sometimes.

But, Mary reminds us that she knows
the brutality of death.

She knows that what she's doing
was an act of gratitude and
an excessive outpouring of love.

She, Martha, and Lazarus had seen firsthand how
the grave cannot hold against Jesus.

In this account, Mary would not be denied
her chance to honor her Lord. (Pause)

A similar thing happened at this church some years ago.

Not that long ago, we needed to make a major repair on this worship center.

The weight of the roof was actually pushing the walls apart and there were decisions to be made.

There was a chance the problem could have been remedied for about thirty thousand dollars,

but this congregation elected to be sure it was fixed, and to make other needed improvements, for a total of about \$195,000.

Could that extra \$165,000 or so have been used to help the poor and feed the hungry?

Of course, but the donors and the congregation wanted to pour out their gifts at the feet of Jesus as a sign of gratitude and awe at all God has done for them in this place.

So that St. Stephen continues on

long after we are gone. (Pause)

You see, when Jesus said,
“The poor will always be with you,
but you do not always have me,”

he didn’t mean we ought to neglect caring for them.

He put things in order for us.

That through the love of God and in the gratitude
and awe of Jesus we excessively pour out
our gifts to the Almighty.

Those gifts are the ones that carry forward
the ministries and programs of the church.

Otherwise, we simply give to causes and
ignore the people suffering.

Jesus was pleased with what Mary did.

I would pledge that Jesus was pleased
with what Olga did, too.

Just as He was pleased with what we did. (Pause)

Judas did not understand the
value of Jesus’ death, but Mary did.

She poured out a year's salary onto Jesus' feet.

What an excessive waste, it was,
but it was this outpouring of love that carried
Jesus into Jerusalem,

and carried him into the love that
he showed to his disciples at the Last Supper
and in the evening when
he washed his disciple's feet.

A love that, above all else, heals.

AMEN!