Sermon by Ann Gray – Uplyme Church 6/4/25

Theme – “What does love look like?” John 12:1-8

Song – I don’t know how to love him

(Click [here](https://youtu.be/fsu06sJYnO0?feature=shared&t=40) to watch/listen)

That’s my favourite song from Jesus Christ Superstar which I went to see a few weeks ago in Sidmouth with my friend Carrie. I had promised her that I wouldn’t embarrass her by singing along with all the songs but this song was a ***definite*** temptation. I compromised by mouthing the words with no sound coming out!

Tim Rice, who wrote the words to the song, is an atheist and he wanted to give the impression (which admittedly many people have) that there was a romantic relationship between Mary and Jesus. Personally, I don’t think that ***was*** the case but it wouldn’t surprise me to learn that Mary had feelings for Jesus. She certainly had feelings enough to be found weeping at the empty tomb when Jesus’ body had been taken away, as she thought. She may well have been someone who followed Jesus or supported him financially. Luke tells us that Jesus had cast out 7 demons from her.

Theologians vary in their view of Mary Magdalene. Some claim she was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, others that she was simply a follower. This ***event***, where expensive perfume being poured on Jesus, is recorded in ***Luke*** as being by an unnamed, sinful, woman. Matthew tells us of an ***unnamed*** woman pouring the perfume but sets the story in Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived. The location in ***Luke’s*** story isn’t given but the host is someone called Simon as in the Matthew telling. ***Mark*** locates the story in Bethany at the house of Simon ***too***. ***John*** claims that the woman with the perfume was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and it took place in ***their*** house. I don’t think that her identity is crucial, it’s the act which is important. At any rate it’s an event of such ***significance*** that it is recorded in all ***four*** gospels.

Whoever the woman ***was***, she certainly showed ***her*** love for Jesus in an extravagant way. It’s complained about by some as a waste of expensive perfume which could have been sold and the money given to the poor. John tells us that Judas wasn’t ***sincere*** in his complaint because he was siphoning money off from the meagre amount the disciples had, in order to enrich himself. But ***I*** think that there would be many people even ***today*** who might have said pretty much the same thing. Perhaps more along the lines of ‘why does the Church of England have so many unused buildings and huge tracts of land? If the church is meant to be representing Jesus and showing concern for the poor, shouldn’t the church sell those buildings and that land and give the money to the poor?’ Jesus pointed out that the poor would always be there but opportunities to demonstrate love for ***Him*** were limited.

How do ***we*** express love? Gary Chapman wrote a well-known book “The 5 love languages” in which he claims we express our love in one of 5 different ways. It might be by spending quality ***time*** with someone. It might be by using of loving ***words*** or simply saying ‘I love you’. Perhaps ***you*** express your love by giving little (or large) gifts to people you care about. Maybe it’s by ***doing*** things for them in both large and small ways or it might be something physical like giving a hug. According to Chapman, we express love in different ways and, depending on our ***own*** particular love language, need to ***receive*** love in ways that are clear to ***us***. So if, for example, ***we*** express our love by saying ‘I love you’ we might not recognise the love being shown by our friend or partner who expresses their love ***differently*** maybe by servicing our car for us or by doing other jobs for us. Something for us all to ponder, perhaps.

In our reading today, Mary (we’ll call her that for ease) expressed ***her*** love in the form of a gift. That gift was expensive perfume. We don’t know how poor or rich Mary was. But certainly the perfume she poured over Jesus was very expensive. According to Google the most expensive perfume in the world is something called Le Monde Sur Mesure, 5 kilograms of which was sold for almost £1.4 million. Imagine what people might say if someone poured ***that*** over a person’s feet!

But the point ***is*** that Mary didn’t count the cost. She gave the ***best*** that she could afford. She was unstinting and generous in her love and not ashamed to show it. We might not possess an expensive perfume (or after shave) but I want to you to think for a moment about your most expensive possession. How would it feel to give it to Jesus? I suspect that many, if not most of us, would baulk at doing that. And yet we cheerfully often say to God when taking up the collection in church that ‘everything we have comes from you and of your own do we give you’. I wonder how far our giving reflects how much we ***say*** we love God. This is not a plug to increase your giving to church, by the way!

Mary demonstrated ***her*** love by giving something extravagant. That extravagance reflects how much she loved Jesus. How much do we love Him?

The answer, if we are honest, is ‘probably not as much as we should.’ That would certainly be ***my*** answer if questioned. Mary knew that ***her*** sins had been forgiven and she wanted to show her love in the only way she could think of. Her love language clearly was that of giving gifts.

But that love pales into insignificance compared with the love that ***Jesus*** had for everyone present at the time and the love he has for each of us here today. I often refer to the story of the priest Maximilian Kolbe who offered to take the place of a fellow prisoner of war condemned to die by starvation in the German death camp at Auschwitz. He gave ***his*** life which, as Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, ***rarely*** happens. Jesus, however, the man ***without*** sin, gave ***His*** life, for ***all*** mankind. Paul continues in Romans by saying ‘God showed his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’ Jesus demonstrated all ***5*** love languages. He spoke words of encouragement, praise and comfort. He physically touched people in need and underwent the physical torture and death by crucifixion. He gave the gift of sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, cleansing to lepers, life to the dead and eternal life to those of us who believe in him.

Our theme this morning is ‘what does love look like?’ well we have an example in Mary that may tell us love looks extravagant and over the top perhaps. BUT the greatest example is in Jesus – love

Jonathan M Seidl writes a blog and he asked the question ‘what does love look like’ and answers his own question this way:

‘I think the best summary of love I’ve heard comes from a pastor named Matt Chandler. Here’s how he puts it: “Love says: I’ve seen the ugly parts of you, and I’m staying.” ‘

Jesus sees everything about us, the good the bad ***and*** the ugly. God knew us from the womb and He sees and knows everything about us, including the things we’d much rather hide from everyone ***else***. God has seen ‘our ugly’ and instead of condemning us He reaches out and says ‘But you know what? I still love you.’

Perhaps you struggle to ***love*** yourself. There are people who genuinely feel themselves to be unlovable. But we have one who loves us despite ***everything*** and who will ***never*** stop loving us. So, if you are tempted to despair or wonder what love looks like there is a simple answer. ***This*** is what love looks like.

A statue of a person on a cross

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