

An act of love!

Psalm 126; John 12:1-8

Being able to offer and accept this offering of healing love from another human is an act of faith. It's an act of compassion. It's an act of love. Acts of reconciliation come in many forms, but the one thing that remains true is that it needs to be a mutual act of engagement. It's a process; the ritual that connects two people or two parties in a moment of openness and vulnerability. It's not always easy, and what stops us is fear. Fear can alert us, call us to attention. Fear sometimes makes us cautious; fear can make us silent. Fear can hold us back; fear can paralyze us. At times, fear makes us seek shelter and fear can isolate us. Fear can keep us from realizing our potential, keeping us from discovering new things about ourselves and about each other. Fear can keep us from truly realizing love. Accepting that we are truly loved.

I believe that the greatest fear that contributes to a society that values independence, that values individuality, that values material things, that values success. That promotes self-preservation over all else...is fear of vulnerability. The fear of intimacy. For many of us, we move through life, and intimacy becomes limited. We can reach a point of intimacy with others, and we enter our life longing for that, and at times, it becomes more difficult. Vulnerability today is often seen as weakness, and as a society, our intent is often to protect the vulnerable. So instead of opening ourselves up to one another, we build walls. Create security. Security that can fracture society. We wish to be protected...but we end up being protected from each other when God calls us to be in relationship with one another.

I realize that by saying this, I am oversimplifying and generalizing, but my point is this: the world is full of fear, and it seems to be feeding off of each other. According to Zygmunt Bauman, "fear has now settled inside, saturating our daily routines, and it looks as if fears have become self-reinforced."¹ I think that for many people who have experienced a significant loss of a loved one – whether it is a child, a parent, a spouse, a friend, a job, a physical ability, mental capacity due to an illness or an accident – this has the potential to close us off from others. It's our human nature to protect ourselves; it's instinctual. After we have been hurt, it becomes increasingly difficult to trust. To be

¹ Zygmunt Bauman, **Liquid Modernity**, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 9.

open, to be vulnerable, especially with new people that we encounter. What holds us back is a lack of trust, fear of rejection, fear of judgement, and a fear of being hurt again.

There's a children's story called *The Velveteen Rabbit* where the rabbit asks the skin horse, "What is real? Does it hurt?" The answer is yes, it does hurt – and that's how you know it's real. You are loved so much that your eyes pop out, your hair falls out leaving bald patches, and your limbs are loose at the joints, but you know through all of that that you are loved, you are valued, and you are real.

This act that we saw so beautifully demonstrated between Brian and Brooke was real. It was real for Mary and Jesus. Jesus accepting this gift of love may change our perception of Jesus. We like to picture Jesus as powerful. We put Jesus up on this pedestal as someone who is perfect, wonderful, and better than all others. We believe him to not be weak. And yet it is precisely his humanity that draws us closer. That helps us to connect with God in a deeper way. His vulnerability in this act of being cared for by Mary not only shows us that we are in a mutual relationship with God, but it is an incarnational relationship. And it confirms that each of us deserves to be loved. That we are loved for who we are.

The Pope's apology to the survivors of Residential Schools was an act of love. It was a first step towards healing. In his words, he acknowledged what happened. It doesn't magically fix everything, nor did Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet protect him from what was to come. This apology rendered the most holy of the Catholic Church vulnerable. He opened himself up to hearing the wounds, to hearing the hurt. He accepted the responsibility of the atrocities of the Christian Church and what had happened. When we take time to listen, we allow the emotions to seep in and we can no longer ignore the truth. And then we are called to act.

Miriam Greenspan, in her book *Healing through Dark Emotions*, states that "Vulnerability is the capacity to be wounded. It's the ability to open ourselves to the feelings that we've denied. It's about openness. Openness to being affected by one another, not just pain, adversity, loss and death, but also love, intimacy, creativity, sex and birth."²

Being truly touched by another human is a great gift, and in that touch, we feel pain. We feel the pain of others. And the vulnerability in that moment is at the heart of our human capacity for empathy, for suffering, and also for joy. The death of Mary's love for Jesus is experienced extravagance of this gift. Mary demonstrates in that moment what it truly means to be a disciple, to express all that she feels and all that Jesus has meant to her. And Jesus is open to that act of intimacy. He welcomes it; he appreciates it.

² Miriam Greenspan, **Healing Through the Dark Emotions**, (Atmosphere Press, 2004), p. 54, 58.

Many of us will hear the echoes of Judas' words in faith communities who are facing financial difficulty: "Why are we, the community of faith, spending money on these specialized ministries when we could be using it help the poor? The people downtown, the people across the world?" The foreshadowing of Jesus' pending death suggests a rather interesting intersection in today's world. As communities of faith, we are facing the fallout of living through this pandemic. We do face uncertainty; we face change, and for some communities of faith, decline. Are we going to be like Judas, holding on the last vestiges of that which once made us powerful, or will we instead take all that we have, all that is important to us, and lavishly pour this out into the world, acknowledging and admitting our weakness? Showing our humanity, our humility and our vulnerability, and trusting in the promise and hope that God offers us through Jesus. Are we ready to open ourselves up to pain? To use our fear to explore new possibilities and pass through this liminal space into something we couldn't see before? How can we be like Mary and help bring about healing? How will we allow ourselves to forget the things of old and perceive that what God is about to do is something new? How will our fear help us to embrace change, to be transformed into something new, and how will we help each other to heal so that we are ready and prepared to embrace what is to come? Are you willing to sow your tears to help heal this earth, one another, everyone that God has created?

I think the time is now. If we were to wait any longer, it would be a mistake. Mary acted in that moment; she was present to what was truly happening. She saw Jesus, and she did not let her fear of rejection or her fear of intimacy stop her from giving back to someone who inspired her, someone who taught her, someone who understood her and someone who loved her. Her heart was open, and her love poured out and was given, and it was healing. Lavishly given to Jesus in the most intimate act in a public space as she let down her hair and wiped away his pain. Through her tears and in that moment, she served Jesus as Jesus will serve the disciples at The Last Supper. She loved and she shared all that she was. So how are we being called to respond to Jesus this day? To whom will you offer this act of love? We are called to respond in vulnerability to both our pain, our joy, and in love. Thanks be to God.