

## *The Power of Vulnerability*

*Isaiah 43:16-21; John 12:1-8*

April 7, 2019

The anointing of Jesus' feet with a perfumed oil that was worth a year's wages gives us a powerful story. We have the knowledge now that this anointing could have had two very different meanings. There are two purposes for anointing in the ancient world. One is that a person about to be anointed as King. Roman rule included an anointing at a coronation with the support of the Court and a blessing by the priest. The other purpose for anointing comes with death and the preparation for burial. Could it be..., that in Mary's listening to Jesus' teachings, that she might have grasped his awareness that he was on the way to the cross? Whether this anointing was a gift of purification for coronation as King, or preparation for burial, Mary has provided a profound gift for Jesus. Either way - Mary got it, and provided the valuable anointing oil.

In Judas' response that Mary could have sold that perfumed oil and given the money to the poor has led us down a questionable path for centuries. This text is a reference to a text from Deuteronomy 15, where Moses commands generosity for the poor, since there will never cease to be some in need. The focus and imperative is NOT that it just so happens that there will be poor people in your midst, the emphasis is the commandment that you - and we - must always keep the poor and vulnerable in our midst.

This scene shows that Jesus is a king, and it shows that he is about to die. He will be leaving soon. Even though he is leaving, his mission remains in the hands of those who follow him. "I am going away," Jesus says, but the poor are always with you. *Keep the poor among you always.*

I had an opportunity to hear a great deal yesterday about the vulnerable in our midst. I attend the Presbyterian Women event held for all the Women of the Presbytery, and learned some very impressionable statistics from Rebecca Barnes, one of the counselors at Children's Hope Alliance. You at Cook's know this organization well, as it is the merged program of Children's Homes across the state, including Barium Springs. You are and have been strong supporters of this program, and that is so very important and deeply appreciated. Rebecca shared that there are 200,000 children in NC who need the assistance of protective housing, and that they are able to provide about half of what is needed. One in three young women will be sexually abused by the age of 17. One in four young men will be abused by the time they are 18 years old. One in three of these desperate, vulnerable children will consider and attempt suicide in North Carolina.

What about adults...?

I wonder what we are able to do in our states of vulnerability. I trust that at least most of us are not struggling with abuse or considering suicide, but vulnerability touches us all. Sometimes we agonize over what we will do next with our health, careers, or family situations. We have reason to be nervous about our lives, to feel out of control, vulnerable...

One major thing that Brown has learned about people who separated the people who have a strong sense of love and belonging and those who really struggle for it is that the confident ones feel a certain sense of courage and belonging. They believe they are worthy. Courage, in its original definition, comes from the Latin word, "cor" meaning "heart." It means that you tell the story of who you are with your whole heart.

I hasten to add that we do not gain our sense of worth from what we DO, but because we know that we are loved by our Almighty God.

Brene Brown: ***Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead***

I was getting my Ph.D. in social work, so my entire academic career was surrounded by people who kind of believed in the "life's messy, love it." And I'm more of the, "life's messy, clean it up, organize it and put it into a bento box."

So where I started was with connection. Because, by the time you're a social worker for 10 years, what you realize is that connection is why we're here. It's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. This is what it's all about. It doesn't matter whether you talk to people who work in social justice, mental health and abuse and neglect, what we know is that connection, the ability to feel connected, is -- neurobiologically that's how we're wired -- it's why we're here.

Jesus had the power to feel vulnerable on his way to the Cross, because he knew that God's love would carry him through. He faced all the "powers" of earthly authority, and then defied their ability, because he had God's love at the core of his heart. Judas, Caiaphas, Chief priests and Roman kings held no power over Jesus.

Mary's strength and power were similar. She could look at Judas, straight in the eye, because Jesus told her that what she had done was a good thing, and she would be remembered for it.

Let us know, too, deep at the core of our heart, that our worthiness comes as a gift from God. Our connection in God's family will sustain us through all struggles, and our power at overcoming vulnerability comes from the courage of knowing the depth of God's love for each and every one of us.