



Westminster Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Dr. Richard Baker
February 24, 2019 Sermon

My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord Having the Mind of Christ: Part III

Scripture Lessons: Mark 14:1-11

What extravagant love the Father has lavished us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are.—1 John 3:1

The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor; it is a sign of genius.—Aristotle

Preface to the First Scripture Lesson:

Two weeks back, I asked what it means to have the mind of Christ, and also what it means for our souls to be anchored in the Lord. I said that having the mind of Christ means using our God-given knowledge and our God-given gifts for the betterment of others. And our soul's being anchored in the Lord means that we acknowledge both that knowledge and those gifts as God-given through things like baptism and church membership.

Both being good, solid Presbyterian answers that emphasize vocation, service, and our expressing gratitude in worship.

Then last week, I asked the same questions, and gave less Presbyterian answers, or at least answers less frequently associated with Presbyterians, starting with joy. Part of having the mind of Christ—a large part, I think—is joy; and we are anchored in that mind, in the Lord, that is, when we build spiritual practices into our lives that enable us to live joyfully.

So this week, I'm going even farther out on a limb: *extravagance*. Now if you know anything about the history of Presbyterians and Presbyterianism, you know that extravagance isn't a word often associated with us. Austerity, frugality, yes; extravagance, not so much.

We tend to be—or at least have a reputation as being—sensible, sober, serious, even somber folk.

But I'm going to say it anyway: Part of having the mind of Christ—a big part, I think—is extravagance, especially extravagance in love. It *is* in the Bible you, know. See if you don't see two or three examples of extravagant love in our Scripture Lesson. The scene is Bethany, Simon's house, at dinner, a few days before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Listen now for God's Word . . .

Sermon

She does what she does, because he is who he is. And because she does what she does, and because he is who he is, he says what he says. And it is all extravagant—fittingly, extravagant—and it will never be forgotten. And that's really all there is to say.

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But just to fill a little time: Mark's Gospel is the rat-a-tat-tat gospel. It's the shortest, fastest, most direct, least reflective. It moves so fast that Mark can't even be bothered with grammar. John wants to

reflect philosophically; Matthew, historically/religiously; Luke, sociologically; Mark wants to tell the story, bare bones, just the facts ma'am:

Jesus does this and then Jesus does that, and then that and this; and then this and that. He heals, he preaches, he teaches, he moves on; he casts out demons, debates the Pharisees, tells parables, moves on; he gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf; feeds four thousand and then five, preaches, teaches, moves on. Rat-a-tat-tat.

But always, everywhere he goes, everything he does, it's always the same question, swirling around him: everywhere, always, all the time, the same question, like a drumbeat, the same question: Who is he?

Who is he? Who? Him. Him, from Nazareth!? Yes, him. Him, the carpenter's son?! Yes, him. Who is he? Could he be . . . The ONE? Yes, no, maybe so; Who knows? Who do you think he is? Who is he?

It begins with Jesus' baptism:

And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The beloved son of God—*That's* who he is. **But:** What was that?! Did you hear that? Hear what? That voice. What voice?—You mean the thunder? No, that voice that said—didn't you hear it? What? Could *that* be who he is? What? Who is he?

And then always, rat-a-tat-tat, everywhere he goes everything he does, the drumbeat continues: He orders the demons to go out of the man and then into the pigs, and then the pigs to go off of the cliff and then into the water; he walks on the water, he stills the storm; he raises Jarius' daughter from the dead.

Who is he? Him? Him. Could he be? Him?! Yes, him. Yes; no; maybe so; Who knows? Who do you think—he is?

It all reaches a crescendo, and—suddenly—stops—in Chapter 8:

On the way to Caesarea Philippi; Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

He is the Messiah. That's who he is. The one from God come to save his people. Peter gets it. Peter gets who Jesus is. No, he doesn't. Not really. Really, not at all. Because next, in Mark's rat-a-tat-tat style, we get this:

Then immediately Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly.

Yes, he is the messiah come to save his people—and now he must die. Peter doesn't get it—doesn't want to get it—won't get it. Rat-a-tat-tat we get this:

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human. Wow! Peter doesn't get it. So, rat-a-tat-tat, off we go.

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain. The transfiguration: *He was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.*

He's shining, talking with Elijah and Moses!—he is—he must be—the Messiah!! That's who he is! But then; rat-a-tat-tat:

Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, for you, for Moses, and for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

In other words, Peter says, "let's just pitch a tent, and hang out here with Moses and Elijah indefinitely. In other words, "Hey, Jesus, let's not worry about all this "the-Son-of-Man-must-undergo-great-suffering-and-be-rejected-by-the-elders-the-chief-priests-and-the-scribes-and-be-killed-and-after-three-days-rise-again" stuff, OK?"

But then, rat-a-tat-tat, we get this:

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

Just like his baptism. This is my son. The beloved. But now one thing new is added, something urgent: Listen to him. *Listen to him.*

Peter can't. He just doesn't get it. And neither do the other disciples. Nobody gets it—yet.

Two more times—chapter 9 verse 30, chapter 10 verse 32—Jesus predicts his suffering and death, and two more times, we get this: "But they (the disciples) did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him."

They still don't get it. Which brings us to dinner at Simon's house—and a woman who will always be remembered and whose name we don't even know: she gets it, she gets who he is.

He is the Son of God, the Beloved, the Messiah, the one come to save his people. She gets who he is. So she does what she does.

And what she does, of course, is anoint Jesus, that is, pour the costly ointment over his head. Anointing is something you do in the Bible, particularly to a king, particularly if you're a prophet. The prophet Samuel anoints David, for example, because one day the shepherd boy David will become King David. And Jesus isn't just any king—he is the king of kings, the messiah.

But what does that mean—the messiah? Well, our word, "messiah" is from the Hebrew word, "Mesiach," and it means "the anointed one." Jesus the Messiah, in other words, means, "Jesus the anointed one."

And so, Jesus Christ. I know we think of "Christ" as Jesus's last name, but actually it is a title, from the Greek word, CHRISTOS, which also means anointed. Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, in other words, Jesus the anointed. That's who Jesus is—the anointed one. So she anoints him.

Because he is who he is, she does what she does. And what she does is extravagant—fittingly extravagant. It's extravagant because it's expensive ointment—procured no doubt at great cost—and maybe at great risk—to herself.

But at the same time, it's only fitting. You know this. I could give you thousands of examples, but the clearest are these: "Thank you," and "I'm sorry." Sometimes they are the only fitting things to say: even if there's nothing else to do, and even if they do nothing else, they are the best way—sometimes the only way—to say the truth. And it needs to be said.

And sometimes it can be said without words. Sometimes actions become metaphors that speak the truth—perfectly.

If you want to see this in American iconography, do you remember, *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Do you remember—after lawyer Atticus Finch gives his famous closing argument in defense of Tom Robinson: "In the name of God, do your duty; in the name of God, believe Tom Robinson."

And then after the verdict—a guilty verdict, you remember—as Atticus slowly gathers his papers to leave the courtroom head down, shoulders slumped, do you remember all of the black townsfolk, in the balcony, rise to their feet, and stand, silently, as a fitting gesture of respect.

Sometimes actions become metaphors that speak the truth—perfectly. She anoints Jesus. He is the Messiah.

Oh, and one more thing: In the Bible, anointing is not just something you do to kings; it's also something you do to prepare dead bodies for burial. Which is why Jesus comes to her defense:

“Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.”

Which goes back to the words that Peter and the disciples could not hear:

“The Son of Man, Jesus told them, must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

That is the extravagant act of love on God's part: Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for his friends. And the only fitting response is an extravagant gesture that speaks that truth. She does what she does, because he is who he is. And because she does what she does, and because he is who he is, he says what he says, which is this:

“Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

It is all extravagant—fittingly, extravagant—and it will never be forgotten.

We have the mind of Christ, when we act, in all our actions, when we live, in all our lives, when we become, in all we are, metaphors that extravagantly speak the truth of God's extravagant love.

But how do we sustain it? How do we anchor our souls in the Lord, so that we always have the mind of Christ? Because, by definition, extravagance cannot be sustained—it soon exhausts itself. But even more than that, it is possible to love not wisely but too well. That is, to “love” in a way that incurs great costs not only to oneself but also to the object of one's supposed love. And to think you're acting in a “Christ-like way” while you're doing it. “Enabling” is the word therapists use, and it is exhausting. I mean, not to be too Presbyterian about it, but isn't it time for a little sensible, sober, serious, even somber talk about *boundaries*? Sometimes setting boundaries is the only way to love and be loved as we should, both wisely and well, witness Jesus rebuking Peter: “Get behind me, Satan”—a dramatic case of setting boundaries if ever there ever was one.

So now for the second and more difficult part of the sermon [look back at choir/watch/shrug]: how do we sustain extravagant love by anchoring our souls in the Lord?

The answer is, we don't. We don't because God has already has. This is what the extravagant love of God in Jesus Christ does: it anchors us in the Lord. Therefore we have faith that God not only loves us extravagantly in Jesus Christ but is with us here and now in the person of the Holy Spirit to teach us how to love BOTH wisely and well, both of which are required for us to love with true extravagance. Will we make mistakes? Yes. But we will learn from them. We will learn from our friends, from our church, from the Bible and our prayers, from the world, from our own hearts and experience. We will learn, and we will have the mind of Christ, and our souls will be anchored in the Lord. That is the extravagant love of God.

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.