

Crossings Community Church  
Matt Powell  
Series: John: The Way to Joy  
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John 12:1-11

It is good, good to be here today. I enjoy the whole New Year thing. I really enjoy New Year thoughts. I like the idea of sort of realigning life amidst... When things kind of get a little bit out of whack, I like the New Year to think about putting them back into whack. You know?

For us, the fall when school starts and New Year's... Every year I think that way, because life, I think, for everybody in Katy really but especially my home and those homes that are in school, when school starts... You're like, "Okay, we're going to set a rhythm." Then something about January, right? You can kind of reevaluate and set a rhythm.

I'm also incredibly excited about what God is going to do in the life of our church in 2016. Sometimes when I say things like that, I know certain people and personalities are like, "How can he say that? He doesn't know what God is going to do in our church this year." Here's how I can say that and how I can say it so confidently. Every single year in the life of Crossings Community Church, God has done amazing things. It's the truth!

There has never been a year in the life of our church where God hasn't done amazing things. Now the difference is there have been years where God moved in the way our leadership and I were praying and expecting, and he moved that way amidst all the other ways. There were other years (and there *will* be years) where the way we're praying and we feel led, he moves in a different way. It's no less beautiful.

Every year, God has done amazing things. I think this year is just going to be another one of those years inasmuch as we are a church that continues to pursue the things of his Word, proclaiming his Word boldly, seeing lives disciplined and transformed by the truth in his Word, seeking to live our lives to glorify him. He will move in amazing ways. That's what we're here for.

Another thing I'm excited about is as we announced at the end of last year... We've talked about it in so many different contexts here between small group and different meetings. We just shared the vision God placed on our heart for this ministry home, this facility that is setting out there in the future. I think, I really believe, that's going to be something that begins to mark what God does in our church.

I'm looking forward to (and this is the first time I've said this) hearing the stories of God placing it on families', homes', individuals' hearts to give toward that. As they give toward that, it doesn't matter what the amount is. The amount is whatever God laid on their heart. As they give toward that, faithfully seeing how God moves and works.

Here's what happens every time that story plays out. We feel God does something, and God uses that walk of faith to stretch us and mold us, because what seems like it makes sense or maybe even seems easy to us in the beginning doesn't stay that way. God does things, and he stretches us. He demands faith from us. He wants us to be dependent on him to show up in radical ways. I'm excited about hearing those stories that I know are going to be told throughout the life of our church.

See, I think all of those things, whether you look at just the excitement or the reality, the promises of being a church that proclaims the Word of God, pursues glorifying him amidst discipleship and transformation, that's worship. You see, when we talk about being a church that gives sacrificially, not just the tithe but gives above and beyond that to the vision God has given, that's worship. All of that is about a heart of worship.

See, as we get into John, chapter 12, this morning, I think that's what is on display for us: Mary's heart of worship. We followed Jesus through as we've looked at the gospel of John, and we're here at John, chapter 12. We've seen all of these different things he has done, and we've seen various transitions amidst his life and ministry. We're getting to a place right now where tone, mood, is beginning to shift.

You see, earlier on as we read, we saw Jesus say things like, ***"My time has not yet come."*** We saw even a reluctance for him to perform miraculous works because his time had not yet come. We're at a place in the gospel where his time is now. We're seeing tone change. We're seeing the miraculous works escalate. If you remember where we left off in John's gospel, he had just raised a man from the dead. It's escalated.

Here we are in John, chapter 12. Let's take a look at this awesome moment in history where we have Jesus, we have Mary, we have Martha, we have Lazarus, we have Judas, and we have some other locals who are gathering together at the table. I'm going to read to you here from John, chapter 12. If you don't have a Bible, pick one up on your device. I don't know if we have any out under seats this morning, but just connect here with me if you don't. John, chapter 12, verse 1, says...

***"Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***

***But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.***

***Jesus said, 'Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.' When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus,***

***whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus."***

We're not going to focus on that last paragraph, but just notice for a moment the condition of the hearts of the Jewish leadership. Lazarus... Rather than believing in Jesus because he just raised the man from the dead, they want to destroy the evidence. That's how extreme or how far, how cold their hearts had gotten.

You see, this moment is the Saturday before the crucifixion of Jesus. That's hard for us to remember, right? If you're familiar with the gospel of John, there are a lot of pages left. Right? You're thinking, "Well, what in the world is going to go on through all of the rest of the pages before we finish the book?" There's a lot of good stuff there, but right now at this moment, as they're reclining at the table, this is the Saturday before the crucifixion. The time is now. The time is now!

Here is this gathering, this meal. They're gathered together, and this tone, as I said, of Jesus' ministry has changed in the way he is acting, the things he is saying. The importance of every moment has escalated to the highest penultimate moment of his life leading into his death, looking ahead at the Passion Week.

If you can picture it in your mind cooking going on, them reclining at the table. Literally, we kind of lose, I think, what was going on. In our minds, we see reclining as in back and relaxed and nice chairs at a table. But the truth is, most likely what was happening here was all of the guests were around the table, lying down on their stomachs. That was the way they gathered and ate together. They were lying down on their stomachs with one arm holding them up and the other eating.

If you can picture in your mind, you have Judas there, and you have Jesus there, and you have Lazarus there. You have others. There were probably others there at the table all around, lying in this way gathered together. I think conversation would've been going strong. They're all talking, right? Lazarus here had just been raised from the dead, so you can imagine the stories he had of how he was telling other people, the stories he had of other people asking or wanting to touch him, or maybe he saw for the first time a bucket list. I'm sure they didn't have that language then.

He was like, "Death is real. Here's the way I want to do things differently, the way I want to love whoever is around me." I don't know if he was married or not. Lazarus is there. Conversation is taking place, and I think rather than (which is our tendency to picture in these moments) this moment where Mary would say, "Okay, Jesus. Everybody, I want you to step back. I'm going to put Jesus in a chair in the middle of the room. Then I'm going to take some ointment here, and I'm going to... I want you all to put your attention toward what's happening here..."

I don't think that's what took place. Rather, as they're lying at this table, I think Mary made her way around quietly, not saying anything. She began to put this ointment on the feet of Jesus. Now the way they were all lying, she wasn't in the center of the room. She wasn't the center of attention. She was going over to respond, to serve, to give, to do this act of worship really in a very behind-the-scenes kind of way.

I think when the Scripture tells us the scent, the aroma, filled the room, I think that may have been when the conversation changed. I mean, they're so involved in the stories that are being told here. They're so involved in hearing from whether it was Jesus or Lazarus or whoever was at the table that all of a sudden, Mary is over here, and she is on her knees. She is back behind Jesus, and she opens the jar.

Everybody in the room (like you would do, right?)... When there's a strong scent, it's like, "What is that? Where is that coming from?" It's Mary. It's Mary, and she has just opened her most prized possession. Amidst all the conversation, the aroma fills the room as it says in verse 3. ***"The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."***

1. *A heart of worship defies cultural expectations.* You see, this story is full of moments that defy cultural expectations. Almost everything Mary does defies cultural expectations. I'll just give you a few examples. The value of the substance she is pouring out over the feet of Jesus defies cultural expectations. We see that play out as the conversation continues.

This most valuable would be used at this moment. See, not only that, but the fact that she was putting it on his feet and not his head. That would have been the expected norm that you anoint or you put something on his head with a perfume or an oil like this. But she is back there putting it on his feet, defying cultural expectations.

Taking down her hair. You see, Mary was a good Jewish woman, and that was forbidden for her to take down her hair like that. Not only that, but she is taking down her hair, and instead of using a towel, she is using that hair to wipe the feet of Jesus. All of this in the face of every cultural expectation, every norm. The point is Mary didn't care. She didn't care what was normal. She didn't care about cultural expectations.

What we're seeing here in this moment is this vulnerable eruption of worship out of the heart of Mary. There isn't anything else that could have gotten in the way of that eruption. Her affection is spilling out of her heart through the actions she is walking in. It's really an amazing moment. She adored Jesus. She understood the worth of Jesus, and she understood all of those other things that could have stopped her in that moment paled in comparison to the worth of Jesus Christ.

What if you and I loved Jesus that much? What if we loved Jesus that much? You see, what if we lived that way because of the incredible worth of Jesus? We looked at cultural normalcy, expectations, perceptions, and we didn't care a bit about it. We lived our lives recklessly proclaiming in worship the worth of Jesus in every action we committed. What would our lives look like?

I understand maybe it's a little offensive, but I believe it would look different than what it does today. I believe there's a difference in living a life that looks that way than what our lives look like today. Let me ask the question a little bit differently. What if at Crossings Community Church, what if this body of believers, what if this church, was a church that loved Jesus that way? What if, instead of giving a second thought to any perception or what's normal, we radically worshiped Jesus Christ in everything we did?

What if instead of thinking, "I don't know whether or not I should put my hands up here, or I should get on my knees here. I kind of feel like I should, but I feel like if I do, everyone is going to look at me and think this way about me." Or, "I don't know if I should walk up and engage in worship through grabbing somebody else and praying, because then everybody else is going to think I'm struggling with the worst sin in the world."

What if we didn't care about perception because the worth of Jesus Christ in our lives destroyed all of those cultural normalities, expectations, perceptions? They were meaningless to us in comparison to Jesus.

Lori and I went to Austin, and we stayed a couple of nights in Austin. We always celebrate our anniversary after Christmas, because Christmas is so busy. We celebrated our eighteenth anniversary in Austin this year. We were there, and there are a lot of things we like to do. Since we went to college near there, we kind of know the area. We go into the restaurants. They have some great musicians we know there who we go see every time we're there.

There's also a bookstore. It's called the BookPeople. If you've been to Austin, kind of downtown, maybe you've come by it. It's rare these days to find a bookstore. It's also rare to find one with kind of that independent vibe, which the BookPeople has. It's a large bookstore. Every time we go, we enjoy going there. We didn't buy a thing. We went twice, and we didn't buy a thing.

I love just going and being in a bookstore. I like the smell. There is a smell when you walk in the door that's intoxicating to me. I love it! We went in, and we were just looking. We were browsing. There's an REI next door. Now you guys may not picture me as an outdoorsy guy. I haven't done much, but I like to dream about being that way. I guess that's what they call like a poser or something. I love to go to REI.

With these two right next to each other, we're going in that one. We're going in REI. We're just enjoying being around there and browsing around these great places. Here's an observation for you. Before you cast judgment upon me, let me explain all of this. There is a large group of people who stink horribly in both of those places. They smell horrible. A very pungent odor. The odor is body odor. That's what it is. You can't mistake it for anything else.

Now before you guys get offended (some of you in this room), there are allergies. I know, I know, I know. I know there are chemicals in deodorants that make certain people not be able to wear them. I also know, yeah, that's a real issue. I get that. I get that! You can't convince me Austin, Texas, attracts this huge amount of people who only have an allergy to that chemical. Okay? There has to be more to it than that.

What you *can* convince me of (and I think is a reality) is there are a few people who have an allergy, but the majority of them have a passion and conviction. I think that's their driving force. There's a passion and a conviction that they don't want to partake of whatever is in, associated with, that product. Okay?

That passion, that interest, drives them to not care a bit about what anybody else around them thinks. That's obvious, right? They don't care if you don't like the way they smell, because they're so passionate about this cause or this reason, this interest, they have. I think that's great. I admire their passion. I don't have it, but I admire their passion.

Can you imagine? I mean, just think for a moment. You walk into a place like that, and the first thing I think when I... Well, the second or third thing I think after I'm in a place like that and I'm thinking through it is, "Here these guys are so passionate about these issues." Then you walk into the church, and you see people who come together with the cause of celebrating Jesus Christ who came and lived and died and rose again to give them life. Yet sometimes it's the coldest place you could possibly ever be. Isn't that heartbreaking?

Here's a group of people up there who I came into contact with. They could care less what anyone else thought about them because of their passion and their interest. You and I have a passion. We have a Savior who is worth so much more than any other possible passion you can have in your life. A heart of worship defies cultural expectation.

Judas' response in this interaction is motivated by the value of the oil Mary is using. It says it this way. ***"Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair."*** Judas' question in verse 5 lets us know what the value is. ***"Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"***

One denarius equals a day's wage. Three hundred denarii is basically a year's salary. Here's this ointment, this perfume, this bottle, whatever canister it was in. The value of what she is pouring on the feet of Jesus is worth one year's work. That should put it in perspective for us. You see, money means different things in different ages and different cultures, but a solid year's work we can all connect with that. That is a lot.

Judas is asking the question here, "Why didn't we just sell it, and we take all the money and give it to the poor?" We see his motivation here in a minute. See, it's not only about the money, the value, if they could've sold it, but it's so rare. You see, nard only came from the northern mountains of India. Even if she sold it in this moment where she is using it, it is almost irreplaceable. I think for Mary, it *was* irreplaceable.

2. *A heart of worship gives abundantly.* I really believe this is Mary's most valuable possession. Here's why I think that. I like to warn you when I go a little bit outside of the black and white. I'm connecting dots here. I believe the reason she used her hair is she did not have a cloth appropriate for this circumstance. She didn't have a towel she could've used. I think if she had a towel, she would've used it here.

I think this possession of Mary's is her most valuable. I don't think it would've been something she purchased. I think it was probably something she inherited. It was probably an inheritance that came to her that there is no way for us to know how long maybe this substance was saved, savored. Jesus comes into the room here, and he is reclining at the table. He is lying down, and all Mary can think about is, "My greatest possession must be given to Jesus."

A heart of worship gives abundantly. You see, you and I struggle. We begin to talk about (as Josh mentioned)... We struggle with the tithe, 10 percent. We read the New Testament, and we understand a tithe (10 percent) is a minimum standard. It's like, "Here you go. This is how you start beginning to walk as a Christ follower."

What we see here in Mary, this is so much more than 10 percent. This is a heart of worship that is sacrificially giving away her most prized and valuable possession. This is sacrificial giving. This is abundant giving. This is a heart on display that can care about nothing else outside of the worship of a precious Savior. That's a beautiful picture.

Verse 5: ***"Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"*** Judas was saying. ***"He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it."*** Greed and idolatry, I firmly believe, are impossible to hide. I believe that is a sin that cannot be hidden. It can be disguised for a season, for a moment.

Judas here is trying to disguise it in righteousness. How crazy is that? But yet it's on display. John, our author here, lets us into the desire here. Obviously, it would've been in the mind of Jesus. What Judas is saying really amidst these cloaked words is, "That's a lot of money. If we sell it and we put it in our moneybag here that we carry around, I can begin to take money from it." It was like this response out of Judas. This is how strong the sin response can be.

Immediately when he sees something so valuable, he leaps out to say something like, "Gosh! We should sell that because we need the money." He is so overcome by the greed and idolatry. What's amazing to me when I think about this moment is to think that here's Judas, and he is lying down, eating with Jesus. Sometimes I hear in our language we use, "My relationship with Jesus... I'm feeling kind of distant from him. Temptation is becoming bigger."

He could reach Jesus probably. He had seen Jesus. He knew Jesus, but not only that. The man Jesus just raised from the grave is at the table. That's how strong this greed and idolatry are in Judas' heart, and it's just as strong as it can well up in us too. Even with Judas sitting right there next to Jesus himself, right across from maybe or next to on the other side Lazarus, the one who was raised from the dead, he is still responding to these circumstances out of greed and idolatry.

Notice Jesus' response. This is verse 7. ***"Leave her alone..."*** You see, I think Jesus knew. Jesus knew what was going on, right? He knew what was going on in Judas' heart. He could have just called him out for it right then. "You're a thief, and you're trying to take this money for yourself." He didn't do it. I think the reason he didn't do it is he knew the events that needed to fold out over the coming week.

He says, ***"Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."*** Jesus says, ***"Leave her alone..."*** I think what I read in that in his language of, "You'll always have the poor but not always me here," he is saying, "I'm worth this." I think that's something maybe only Jesus could say. He is

there, and he is saying, "Judas, she is pouring out her most prized possession that's more valuable than maybe anything any of the rest of us have. I'm worth her doing that at this moment."

Jesus is worth it. He is worth our greatest and most valuable possessions. You and I... Maybe that's your time. Maybe it's your money. He is worth it. Jesus is worth our abundant giving hearts. He is worth it. He is worth our risks and radical obedience. "But, God, if you're calling me to do this, I don't know how this is going to work. I'm a little nervous about this. I'm scared about this thing."

Jesus is worth it. He is worth us pouring out our lives in worship to him. Jesus is worth our tithes. Yes, but as Mary displays, he is worth so much more. Sacrificial giving, a heart of worship, gives abundantly. Here's the beautiful part of this story that I think Mary has no idea about. Jesus is going to be crucified in six days.

Culturally, it was normal for as a man was approaching death, he would be anointed with a very expensive oil, one that was abnormally expensive for the family and friends. I mean, they would spend an unusual amount of money in order to acquire the oils, the ointment, the perfume to put on the man who was approaching his grave.

Mary had no idea that this quickly Jesus was about to end up on the cross, in the tomb. She is part of something that is really so much bigger than herself. She didn't understand the symbolism of what was happening here. She was just responding in worship, which is the last point you have this morning.

3. *A heart of worship is used by God in unimaginably glorious ways.* I've shared this story before, but I'll try to glide over it quickly. Lori and I... I was working full-time in ministry at a church in Houston, and I was a graduate student full-time working on my master's degree. I was taking 15 to 18 hours of master's work while being full-time employed in ministry, and we had one baby at home. Life was nuts for us. We did that for three years in that cycle.

Financially, we had *nada*. It was an intense season for us. We barely were able to scrape things together to eat with the help of friends and family. So paying for my master's degree was out of the question, but we knew God had called us to be there and do that. We were just kind of thinking, "Okay, here we are. We're going to walk, and we're going to be faithful and obedient." This is the part I've shared before.

My supervisor there at the church I was working in called me into his office. He laid on the desk a white envelope filled with cash, enough cash to pay for nearly all of my master's degree. He set it before me. It was cash. It was not given as a check through the church. It was as anonymous as any anonymous individual could ever be. I still don't know who they are today.

Here's the thing. As I think back on that, that giver, that heart of worship, he/she is a part of every single ministry engagement I have ever been a part of. You see, as I teach at the seminary here in Houston and I teach pastors who sit before me, that heart of worship is a part of the legacy of all of those pastors who are going to go out all over the world who I've taught there.

As I come here and I say, by God's grace alone, as I open his Word, he uses me as a vessel to impact lives in this community or spin off families into their workplaces or into their neighborhoods or across the globe. That heart of worship is a part and has a legacy in every single element of that story. I don't know if they know an ounce of it. They don't know the whole thing, but I don't know if they know any of it.

See, a heart of worship is used in unimaginably glorious ways. As we give, as we respond in every aspect of our worship, whether that's our financial giving or it's just the way we grab another person and pray or the way we respond together as the church by throwing our arms in the air as an encouragement by the way we're worshipping, that impacts those dominoes that are set in place. We will never know how many dominoes fall because of that act of worship.

A heart of worship is used in unimaginably glorious ways. I told Lori this week, "Everything we have, everything about us...our family, our marriage, our financial situation, where we live, how we live, his church...is all about him. It's all because of him." There is no other possible reason. There are no other talents, and there are no other solutions to our lives aside from Jesus. I said, "How can we not abundantly give of everything we have?"

Our time. How can we not pour ourselves out? Our talents given by him. How can we not pour ourselves out? Financially. How can we not pour ourselves out to him because everything about who we are is because of him? I'm going to invite you into Matt's world here as we close. As I think about this future facility, whatever it looks like and as I wrestle in my heart with, "What does it mean for us as the Powell family to give sacrificially toward that...?"

I thought this week as I read this Scripture, what I'm most excited about is not... This is me as the pastor and whatever that building looks like. I expect that someday I'll stand, and I'll proclaim the Word of God in it. What I'm most excited about is that other people will. Generation after generation will proclaim the Word of God in it.

As I give sacrificially and my family does, we're not just a part of what we will see, but God will use our hearts of worship in unimaginable ways. There will continue to be families generation after generation who are spun out all over the world. As we give, that's a part of what God does through my heart of worship. That's exciting to me. That's more exciting than the part I will even see or walk in or experience, but God is going to move in ways that are bigger than Matt Powell. That's wonderful, good news.

This morning as we respond, I want to invite you to bow your head and close your eyes this morning. As we respond in prayer the same manner we respond every single Sunday, I'm going to challenge you today. I'm going to challenge you to respond actively to what God is doing in your heart through his Word this morning.

I want to encourage you today to have the boldness to move around the room. If that's to grab one of our prayer leaders who will be in the back this morning, grab one of them. Pray with them. If you need to confess an area of your life where you're not a worshiper, if you're paralyzed by cultural expectations, then you grab them. You confess that, and you cry out to God, saying, "Give me Mary's heart of worship."

If you're just hungry for somebody to lock arms with you and join you in prayer regarding the circumstances of your life, would you be so bold as to respond in that way? As we sing this morning, might we respond and sing to a Savior who is worth so much more than we can ever give. May our fears of cultural expectations, perceptions, be destroyed in comparison to him.