

# Fifth Sunday in Lent

Year C

RCL

- [Isaiah 43:16-21](#)
- [Philippians 3:4b-14](#)
- [John 12:1-8](#)
- [Psalm 126](#)

Roger's Innovation Curve is a bell curve that shows how we as people fall into a spectrum of how we react or respond to and adapt to innovation and change. Basically speaking, how comfortable are we to take risks or in general accept something 'new'. On one end of the curve is a very small percentage called Innovators- individuals who adopt what's new almost immediately. These are the ones who are pulling the change. They watch companies and look forward to all new products. They have a penchant for taking big risks. Then there are the early adopters. People who try out new ideas, but in a careful way. In the middle is the majority, where most people fall in adapting to new ideas. Once they see where society is moving, they hop on board. And then at the other end, are those that simply just don't want new things. Things have worked well in the past and they work well as they are. God says, time and time again, a new thing is about to happen. Isaiah prophesied about it: Do you perceive it? Our psalmist claimed it. Paul wrote letters about it. And Mary of Bethany, well, she not only perceived it, but understood so deeply that in her act of anointing Jesus feet, she showed not only Judas, and Lazarus, and Simon that she got it, but she proclaimed to the world that this new thing was about to happen.

Mary was an innovator. A courageous and bold risk taker. She understood that are times when you need to act because you won't get another chance. She saw that the time was now and she didn't hesitate to act. It was controversial and scandalous. She took that costly, valuable, expensive bottle of perfume. She anointed not Jesus'

head, a kingly anointing, but his feet, a ritual after death. And then, she literally let down her hair, drying his feet with her own hair- which should be covered. On the cutting edge, Mary was a prophet of the resurrection that was to come.

It wasn't a comfortable moment in any sense. But Jesus encouraged her demonstration of mercy. Leave her alone he said. Using the same oil that would be used to embalm a body, she recognized what was about to happen to Jesus. Less than a week away, in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, death but most especially life was about to change for anyone who encountered that Good News. Resurrection is place where we are called into extravagant generosity and service, which Mary perceived. And that the time to do it was here and now. It is not a time of scarcity, but of abundance. Judas didn't perceive it- he didn't get it. For him, he chose to be stingy, to save the good only for the right moment, to not worry about being generous in love or service. He had set other priorities. But in the context of hearing this as a Jewish listener when Jesus spoke it, they would know that this line about the poor came from Deuteronomy- in reference to the Jubilee year. In rabbinic theology, there were two classifications of "good works": things that pertain to mercy, i.e. burial, or those that pertain to justice, i.e. almsgiving. It's not an either/or.<sup>1</sup> Both are crucial to those who live a life of resurrection hope.

At this moment, Mary knew what she had to do to. She understood that then and there, her love for Jesus, shown in this way of mercy, needed to be completed. Can you feel the utter sense of urgency? She offered him her life's work- this oil that costs so much you might only get to buy it once, if even that. A lifetime of savings to purchase. Somewhere around 20 to 30 thousand dollars in today's money. Fragrance of perfume doesn't go away, just like when you do an act of mercy or service. It ripples out and remains in our world. One of my friend's dad volunteers regularly at a

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Raymond. *The Gospel According to John*.

local elementary school. A young girl went around to everyone and asked if she could draw hearts on the hands of those who were volunteering. Days later, every time he moved his hand, he detected a trace of a scent. Something fruity. He later discovered she used a scented marker, strawberry, to make those hearts. Her act of thanksgiving for their presence remained with him much longer than her simple but powerful drawing.

Just like Mary's demonstration- this scent of love was different than the world had ever seen. This fragrance filled the whole house- moving from room to room, and, it was extremely likely that as Jesus would be nailed to the cross 6 days later, the scent of the perfume would remain. The scent of death. The scent of sacrifice. The scent of extravagant generosity in love. The scent of overturning oppression and inequality. In the end, the scent of resurrection and new life- a new thing. This new thing, which has come to all of us in the person of Jesus and soon in the resurrection, is to be shared, abundantly and extravagantly- with the rich and the poor alike. Just like the fragrance, once it has been released, there is no stopping it from springing forth.

In adopting this newness that springs forth, and in being adopted by it, Jesus doesn't ask us to give up all of the old. God shows us tradition and innovation can walk hand in hand. We're not all going to be like Mary of Bethany. We need people all over that bell curve to make life work. The Bible shares stories about all sorts of people and how they connect to God. And all of them, just like us, are beloved by God. But, regardless of who we are, we can all be transformed by hearing Mary's story- of being extravagantly generous with mercy and love. Knowing what happens when we love someone, it takes courage and big risks to be like her. With this season of Lent coming to an end, how can we all stand to live more recklessly as we love mercy and act justly with God and our neighbors?