

Our rainbow color for today is indigo and it is really a stretch to come up with a meaning for it. And so I've decided we'll have it be a color that means confusion. As a child you may have been taught the way to remember the colors of the rainbow is to remember the name Roy G Biv. The letter R O Y G B I V standing for red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. The thing is, there is a debate as to whether indigo should be considered a color of the rainbow or not. Isn't indigo just a shade of blue in the color spectrum?

I'll let the answer be with those who are experts in colors. Confusion, however, fits with our gospel reading for today. We find ourselves in the very uncomfortable position of taking the point of view of Judas. Even though the text tells us that Judas was a thief and he only says, "Why wasn't this sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" because he wants to get his own personal grubby hands on it, we are still in an uncomfortable position. Why such waste?

Let's change the image to be like this. Imagine a close friend or family member is dying and they've entered Serenity House, or some similar hospice facility. Many people are sending cards and flowers. But then one person sends not just a bouquet of flowers, and not just a big bouquet of flowers, but a whole flower shop inventory of flowers. Van after van of flower delivery people pull up. The entire room is jammed floor to ceiling with flowers. Ever gone into a flower shop and found the smell overwhelming? Flowers smell sweet, but too many of them and it becomes too much.

That's the effect of this perfume that Mary is pouring out. We are told it could be sold for 300 denaris. A denaris was a day's wage, so this is about a whole year's worth of money spent. Can you imagine spending your entire annual income on flowers for a dying person? What waste!?! The person is going to die anyway. A nice bouquet will do nicely to let the dying person know you care.

Indigo is the color of the day, and we are confused. We find ourselves siding with Judas. Why wasn't this money spent

on someone who could benefit from it? Jesus is going to be just as dead whether he gets this perfume poured on him or not.

Once again the Gospel of John is challenging us with extravagance. Remember what happened when Jesus turned the water into wine? The wine had run out - which meant that the guests had probably already drunk too much. Now would be a good time to cut people off. But Jesus goes and creates about 160 more gallons of wine so the party can continue. Where is the sense in that? Where is the propriety? Where is sobriety!?! It is excess beyond all reason. Why would God encourage such destructive behavior?

I must confess that if you are bothering to follow along with this sermon then I am trapping you. I'm deliberately creating the trap that the gospel of John is working hard to free us from. As John tells us the story of the ministry of Jesus he wants us to take everything we *think* we understand about propriety and impropriety, about stewardship and responsibility, about wisdom and foolishness, and a about power and weakness, and set it aside.

Something new has arrived, John wants to tell us. It is Jesus - God with us. And we now need to reconstruct *everything* in our lives according to those new categories. Thus far in the gospel Mary is the only person who seems to fully grasp that. Now, the way she is showing it is undeniably skewed. Anointing a man's feet with perfume and then wiping them with her hair is not an innocent action. Her desires for Jesus are certainly what we would call inappropriate. But, that is not the point John wants to get across. The point is that Mary is giving everything that she has

-and everything that she is,

-and everything that she will ever be

Fully, and totally, and unreservedly to Jesus.

No social norms, no cultural expectations, no opinions or judgment of other people are going to get in her way.

Commentator Gail O'Day notes this, "The power of the witness of Mary's discipleship in this story is that she knows how to respond to Jesus without being told. She fulfills Jesus' love commandment before he even teaches it; she embraces Jesus departure at this hour before he has taught his followers about its true meaning... In the anointing, she shows what it means to

be one of Jesus' own. She gives boldly of herself in love to Jesus at this hour, just as Jesus will give boldly of himself in love at his hour."

Maybe it's more clear to say it this way. Discipleship to Jesus is not something defined by boundaries or rules or regulations. There isn't a list of right things to do and a list of wrong things to avoid. It is a state of being, a way of living, a way of understanding yourself which goes deeper than something that is simply taught.

Mary's extravagant action was totally wrong on so many levels, yet it was the act of a faithful disciple. Somehow she knew that Jesus was about to die. She was going to anoint her lord and savior for death with the most excellent perfume she could find. Jesus would be crucified within a week. In those days when people didn't bathe it is very reasonable to conclude that the smell of this perfume lingered on Jesus to his death; as he suggests it will. As he was being mocked, beaten, flogged, and eventually nailed to a cross this smell was probably still with him. The smell of a faithful disciple's devotion.

Such a use of expensive perfume is normally a waste. But it was not wasted on the savior of our souls. We can be thankful for Mary's bold act that she anointed Jesus for us.

Let the confusing color of indigo stand for discipleship deep enough to go beyond reason or sense. Let it stand for discipleship based on love and awe of the one who saves us.

If you find yourself falling short of this sort of faith, don't worry. Don't beat yourself up for it. Faith is in God's hands, always; and so are you.

If you feel the need to work on anything, then focus on being thankful. Focus on the blessings God provides. You'll be surprised at how that makes faith grow deeper. May you not be bound by anything or find your faith limited by others. Instead, be free to let faith flow from you in old ways, new ways, and always in God's way. Amen