

“Making Memories”

This is Memorial Day weekend. Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day because it was a time set aside to honor the nation's Civil War dead by decorating their graves. It was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to honor the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers. During the first celebration of Decoration Day, General James Garfield made a speech at Arlington National Cemetery after which 5,000 participants helped to decorate the graves of the more than 20,000 Union and Confederate soldiers buried in the cemetery.

However, even before this, during the 3 years after the Civil War, a number of towns throughout America had been observing the day. Businesses closed, and people would put flowers and flags on the graves of soldiers. Although various towns claim they were the first to celebrate Memorial Day, no one is exactly sure who came first. After World War I, observances also began to honor those who had died in *all of our wars*. And in 1971 Congress declared Memorial Day a national holiday to be celebrated the last Monday in May.

While the trend today is for stores and businesses to be open, and for families to focus on cookouts and the beginning of summer, I hope we will not forget the sacrifices men and women have made in serving their country.

Memorial Day...keeping the *memory* alive. ***There's a Scripture that easily ties in with this theme of creating and keeping memories.*** Turn to Mark 14:3-9. Jesus is having a meal at the house of a man named Simon. As they are eating, a woman comes up to Him with a jar of ointment in hand. (Whether she was already in the house or had just come in, we aren't told). She breaks open the jar, and begins to pour the ointment over Jesus' head.

Mark says this was very expensive ointment. *Nard* - a rare, costly perfume or fragrance. Perhaps a bit surprised and stunned, some people in the room are not happy with what had taken place: “But some were there who said to one another in anger, ‘Why was this ointment wasted in this way?’” (Mark 14:4). Mark doesn't identify who's unhappy with this, but Matthew in relating this story says it was *Jesus' disciples* who were fuming over what this lady did!

What were they so mad about? They thought it was a waste! It says the perfume was valued at over 300 denarii. A “denarius” was about an average day's pay. Almost a year's wages! How much do you make in a year? Imagine pouring that out over Jesus - just like that – it's gone! A year's pay! Maybe the disciples thought, “We're finally ‘getting’ what Jesus has been trying to get across. He tells us to serve, to give to those in need. This lady could have sold that nard and gotten a lot of money to give to poor people.”

But Jesus is the Master of surprises! *“Let her alone” He says!* “But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial’” (verses 6-8). Yes - helping the poor and the needy is a noble thing to do. But you can do that anytime. It was near the end of Jesus' life. The cross was just ahead. This lady *seized the moment*, an opportunity to show her love for Jesus that would soon be gone.

Jesus goes on to say something else – and this is where the theme of creating and preserving memories comes in: “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” (Mark 14:9). What she did will never be forgotten. It will be remembered for generations to come! *And here we are today, remembering her great act of love for Jesus!*

What are we doing for Jesus to create lasting memories – good memories? When’s the last time you and I broke open the jar and poured ourselves out in a memorable way?

One of the ways we can do this is to create a cherished memory for someone. Think of something that someone did for you...gave to you...that was kind of beyond measure – the gift of a treasured memory that someone gave you. Maybe it was something your parents did for you, or gave you, when you were growing up. They didn’t have to, but what they did meant so much that you’ve never forgotten. Unfortunately, some people have childhood memories, but they are not *good* memories. We remember sad or frightening things. I believe the job of every parent is to create some happy memories that their children can carry into adulthood – memories that help a child feel cherished and valued. Perhaps the thing you remember is something your husband or wife did for you – or a friend, or even a stranger – who blessed you in a way that you’ve never forgotten. (*Give time for persons to share stories*).

When I was young, my music teacher formed a band from some of us students. At one point we were to play on a popular nationwide program called the Ted Mack Amateur Hour. (It was kind of a 1950’s version of America’s Got Talent!) A rehearsal was scheduled for us, but it was to be the week I was on vacation. And if I missed the rehearsal I wouldn’t be able to play on the program. My family left for Rehoboth Beach, but once we got there my parents could sense my deep disappointment. On the spur of the moment, mom and dad hired a flight instructor friend at the airport where my dad learned to fly, and paid this flight instructor to fly to Rehoboth, and take me back to Lancaster. My parents arranged for me to stay with our next door neighbors. I never asked how much they had to pay; chartering that flight probably stretched their pocketbook, but they did it. (Part of memory, also, was how rough and choppy the flight was for that little single engine plane, and how we almost collided with an airliner that was going into Philadelphia International.) But I will always remember my parents’ extraordinary act of love.

I have gone on mission trips to Kenya four times. One thing I will always remember from my first trip was before I left, my hosts there gave me a beautiful Kenya made shirt. Later, a few of the people there came over to the U.S., and they brought with them a gift for me. In no way could they afford to give a gift. I was reluctant to take these gifts – but I knew it would be an insult and would translate as my snubbing their graciousness.

There’s a time to break open the jar, and pour out our love in tangible ways for someone. Now it’s true, ***we can’t give expensive gifts all the time!*** I’m not talking about irresponsibility here. People have gone down the tubes financially because they’ve done careless things with their money. What I’m talking about doesn’t necessarily mean *buying* something. It can be another way that you pour yourself out for someone without counting the cost.

There is a time to throw caution to the wind, and do the spontaneous, extravagant thing that will bring joy to the heart of someone else. The woman at Bethany poured out a jar of nard over Jesus - almost a year's wages' worth – and Jesus said her uncalculating act of love will always be remembered.

There's another way we can open the jar and create a memory: ***We can pour ourselves out without measure for Jesus.*** When is the last time you did something out of love for Jesus without thinking about the cost? Some spontaneous act that represented your great love for the Savior? So much of the time we do things as a Christian in a measured fashion, with certain limitations and stipulations: we'll come to church...unless there is something more important going on that day. Or if it's not raining. Or if we get up in time. We'll count ourselves as a Christian...but shy away from talking to a non-Christian about our faith; we'll give money to the church and other worthy causes...but not to the point of truly sacrificing anything; we'll help somebody out who needs help...but make sure it won't impinge too much on our schedule or our plans. So often what we do for Jesus is cautious and calculated.

But the woman in our Scripture text threw caution to the wind, let it rip, and did something extravagant for Jesus that history will remember forever! If she had waited, perhaps she never would have seen Jesus again. Or by then He might have already been crucified, and would have been too late.

In every church I've served, I've been inspired by people who have poured themselves out for Jesus without measure! The need was there...the opportunity was there...and they seized the moment. I think of a lady named Patti. The church had just done a major expansion of the building, and the expansion included setting aside a room as a bookstore. When we discussed who would run the bookstore, we knew we couldn't afford to pay much to whoever it would be. Hearing of the need, Patti offered her services. She had had experience along that line, and offered to be the bookstore manager, without pay. She did it as a labor of love.

I still remember a teenager in another church I served, who gave up a week of fun at camp to help in a Billy Graham Crusade in the area. He seized the moment – after all, how often does a Billy Graham Crusade come to your area? Thank God for people who rise to the occasion – and in a great act of love pour themselves out for Christ!

Now maybe we can't identify with being able to do that *one great act of love* for Jesus...but there's another way we can create these lasting memories: ***we can pour ourselves out for Jesus, bit by bit – day in, day out, month after month, year after year.***

Again, I thank God for so many believers I have known along the way who have done this. ***I think of people in this church who day in and day out are creating a memorial of their love for Christ.*** Those of you over the years who have worked with children in the church; people who count the offering after the service; those who faithfully prepare the communion elements the first Sunday of each month; those who take care of the altar, and those who take care of the flowers; the ladies (and men) who work in the kitchen and set up tables when food is served in

our fellowship hall.

I think of Steve, who has served as church pianist and organist for years, without pay; of the singers and musicians working with Elizabeth to make better our music ministry; of the tech team working the computer (the only time they are noticed is when something goes wrong with the slides!). And then there are the paid staff members who put in extra time, and do more than is required in their job.

I could go on and on, naming people in the church who show their love for Christ by doing the small acts of ministry and service here! And those of you who *beyond the church* – unbeknownst to the congregation – are helping others and creating memories for people as an expression of your love for Jesus. It may not be that one spontaneous act of love for Christ that a lot of people know about – but little acts of love and kindness that all add up to fill a memory bank!

As I was preparing this message, I got thinking about how we tend to remember people, and how I hope I can be remembered as someone looks at my life. For example, one of the boys I knew growing up had a brother named John – and as I think of John, about all I remember of him is that he was a hothead! Boy, id he have an explosive temper. He scared me. That’s how I remember John.

And I remember our Avon lady when I was a kid. She was a rather thin woman, and rather strange. She only lived about a block from our house, but every time she came to our house with her Avon products, she would ask to use our bathroom. That’s my memory of Sally, our Avon lady!

But then, there was a man in the church where I grew up who was kind of my role model for the Christian life. He was an older man who took an interest in me. I remember he loved baseball and loved the Phillies. I recall that he was a small man, very neat, and used Listerine. I remember he had a wonderful sense of humor. But you know what I remember the most, and what my most powerful memory of this man is: he loved Jesus more than anyone else I ever knew. Everything about him smelled of Jesus! And because he poured himself out for Jesus, day in and day out, people loved him, and many people were drawn to Jesus because of what they saw in him.

I hope as people some day remember my life, that in some small way I can be remembered as someone who broke open the jar and poured his life out for Jesus.

Jesus said of the woman at Bethany, “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). It’s not too late for us to create good memories for the people in our life, and to pour ourselves out for Jesus!

