

I grew up in Minnesota until I was 12 years old. My family was Methodist, so when I was eleven I was introduced to church summer camp at good old Camp Koronis in Paynesville, MN. As I was writing this, I became curious and googled the camp. It is still there, just as it was over 65 years ago, when I attended for a week in each of two summers.

I remember most vividly what happened my second summer. It was dusk, and I was on my top bunk in one of the girls' cabins. All of a sudden, one of my cabin-mates came slamming in the back screen-door, breathless with running. "Come quick," she said. I was just out back at the top of the hill. And Jesus was there. I met Jesus. Come and see."

Well, that brought a stampede of 9 other girls out the back door. But not me. I lay rigidly on my bunk, staring at the ceiling of the cabin. I can't remember whether I was afraid of meeting Jesus or of not meeting Jesus when everyone else did. But I have remembered ever since being completely immobilized by the possibility. I have always been a painful introvert, and would have had no idea how to conduct myself. What would I do or say? And I could hear my mother's voice in my ears: "Oh, it's not real; they're just being silly."

This memory surfaces again every time we read this Gospel passage about Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, and her anointing of Jesus while they were at dinner. There could hardly be a greater difference between my response to the possibility of Jesus and Mary's actions toward him. She knelt beside him and broke open a vial of nard, a perfume which would have cost a full year's wages for a working man.

She let down her hair and wiped his feet with the hair and perfume. It would be hard to imagine a more sensual, intimate action. A woman of that time would never have let down her hair unless alone with her husband; and how would she have had the resources to obtain the perfume? The electricity of the connection between Jesus and Mary sizzles through the story.

I am sure that most of the people at table with them were astonished and shocked. Judas probably spoke for them when he criticized the poor stewardship of the "wasted" nard. One doesn't have to agree with John about what motive Judas had in saying this. One can just see the nods of

the other men quietly agreeing with his criticism of her behavior. Or possibly their jealousy at her closeness to the master.

But Jesus' response to the criticism is clear: "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." He saw clearly that Mary knew what was coming, in just 6 short days.

Ahead of him was the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, followed by his own farewell to his disciples with the washing of their feet; his arrest, crucifixion, death and resurrection. This was Mary's last chance to begin the anointing of his body, the demonstration, while he was alive among them, of her deep, wild love for him. Unlike the blind denial of the men in the company, she had truly heard what Jesus said about what awaited him in the city, and she threw herself into an act of both mourning and comfort to somehow support him on his way. Her expression of love for him is reflected in the love he shows for all of us in giving himself to torture and death for our sakes.

Like the disciples who were present for this remarkable dinner, I, too, am jealous of Mary's ability to throw every other consideration aside, to make herself vulnerable, in order to truly touch Jesus. I had feared even going to the top of the hill behind the cabin, feared the possibility of a meeting with the one in whom I would have said I believed. Because that wouldn't have been reasonable, and I have always been such a reasonable person. I still struggle to take in the words of Blaise Pascal – "It is the heart which perceives God, not reason."

But I do know by now that this failing is not mine alone. If you pay attention to what will happen here during Holy Week, you will see large attendance next week for Palm Sunday, and many fewer present for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil on Saturday. Come Easter day, we will be packed with worshippers.

I don't mean to criticize those who do not come to the in-between services. There are many obligations that will keep people away, many activities that folks have on their calendars that any reasonable person would choose as having priority on those days. But I wonder if missing

each other's community at those times is a way of protecting against the possible intrusion of the Holy into our lives?

I recollect a Maundy Thursday service about 20 years ago. There was the usual washing of feet, the celebration of Eucharist, and words reflecting on what was happening to Jesus. After the service Kate McKinnon and Michael Morrow came to find me. They had their four-year-old son, Willie, with them, and he was in tears. Kate said, "Can you explain to Willie why Jesus had to be crucified?"

Oh, yes. That is exactly why I went to seminary; my theology courses should get me through this. No wonder people don't come to these services. I can't remember what I said – something about Jesus being willing for this to happen to him because he loved us so much. It seemed to meet the need at that moment. But, again, this is a memory that remains with me long after the fact. (Although Willie probably doesn't even remember the whole thing.)

It's one of our problems with God, the way in which she may suddenly appear and make us completely vulnerable to the deep love that turns the cosmos, may call us to be present to the whole sweep of Holy passion for us, inviting us to find our own passion in return. As the Rev. Reagan Humber puts it: "What won't always be with us is the opportunity to see God in whatever and whomever stands in front of us right now. The kingdom of God is here. Right now is the moment when God can break our hearts. The love of God is the grace of now."

So I can testify to all of you that it is precisely the grace of God which can bring us to our own acts of unreasonable love, can free us for the vulnerability of pouring out worship and gift. This is what matters more than our memorized creeds, our grasp of doctrine. The touch reaching deep into our hearts is the meaning of everything. What it is really all about is Jesus.