

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

John 12: 1-8  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 March 17, 2013

### **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE**

Kids, did you hear that our friends in the Roman Catholic Church have a new leader, a **new pope**? His name was **Jorge Mario Bergoglio**. But now that he has been chosen pope, he gets to pick a **new name**. Do any of you know what new name he chose? He chose the name "**Francis**." That was the name of a leader in the Catholic church hundreds of years ago. He was called "**St. Francis of Assisi**."

I think when popes choose new names; they are picking the name of someone that they want to be like as they lead the Roman Catholic Church. **St. Francis** was the kind of a person who was **well known for loving people, the world, animals and even bugs**. He wanted to help there to be **peace** in the world. He wanted to **help poor people** have enough to eat. He wanted to **protect critters and the whole creation**. He didn't worry much about himself. He cared more about others. I guess the new pope wants to be like St. Francis. He has already been living a lot like that even before becoming the new pope. Now our friends who belong to **St. Phillip's Catholic Church** here in Aitkin have a new church leader. It would be good for us to be praying for them and for their new leader.

Have any of you ever gotten a new name? We get our first name when we are born, right? We get another name when we are baptized. Remember, "**I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit**?" What new name do we get when we are baptized? Our new name is "**Christian**." We are named after **Jesus Christ**. We are called "**child of God**."

Do you think that you might want to **live like the One you are named after, Jesus Christ**? Remember, Jesus **loved everybody, forgave** people, **fed** people, **healed** people and **helped people to go to heaven** when they die. As Christians, we try to follow Jesus too. We try to love everybody, forgive people, feed people, heal people and help people to go to heaven when they die. What name were you given when you were **born**? My name is Darrell John Pedersen. What name were you given when you were **baptized**? **Christian**. God bless the **new pope** and the **Roman Catholics** and **all of us Christians** as we **try our best to follow Jesus together**. Amen.

## ADULT MESSAGE

It was morning in Aitkin, Minnesota - just this past week. I had my hands full and was making a couple of trips back and forth from my car to the church. Once when I came out, I heard the sound of a helicopter coming from over toward the airport. I stopped to listen. Overhead, hazy, low clouds hung suspended. The helicopter sounded like it was approaching the hospital. "Oh," I thought, "it must be the emergency helicopter coming to transport somebody to one of the big metro hospitals for special care." I immediately offered up my prayer for when emergencies occur. "God be with those who are in trouble and with those who go to help them. Amen."

I continued to listen and to strain my eyes for a glimpse of the helicopter as it broke through the clouds and landed at the hospital. It didn't stop. It continued to fly out of sight, right over where I stood. It went south. "Oh, it's already made its pickup and is heading for the Cities." Back into the church I went with another load. As I emerged, there was the sound of the helicopter headed back to the northeast toward the hospital. I stopped and stared upward again. "This time I will see it land." No, it flew past the hospital. Into the church I went. When I stepped back outside; the copter passed again to the south. "What in the world is going on with that helicopter? Can't it find the hospital? Doesn't it have radar to guide it in? Oh well, I have to get to work." Once more I went in and came back out of the building and sure enough, the helicopter was just returning from the south and headed again toward the hospital. I don't know what was going on.

What had that helicopter been waiting for? Wasn't the patient ready? Did it have to wait until just the right time to land? I couldn't see the helicopter at all. Could it see the hospital and city of Aitkin down below?

That morning, before leaving home, I had been working on today's sermon. I had been considering these two characters, Mary and Judas. As I had stood gazing skyward trying to catch a glimpse of that hovering helicopter, it occurred to me that this might be a little bit like Jesus as he related with Lazarus, Martha, Mary, Judas and the other disciples at supper that evening. "What are they going to do?" Was that helicopter waiting for something to happen before it could land?

Is Jesus waiting for something to happen with Mary and Judas? Even now, is Jesus waiting, watching to see what will happen with you and me?

Today's Gospel text from John 12 occurs just over a week prior to Jesus' death on the cross. It is **dinner time** at Lazarus, Martha and Mary's house. They have prepared a special meal for Jesus. He has eaten in their house before. He had actually brought Lazarus back from death just a few days earlier. I can't imagine the **appreciation** this brother and his two sisters must have had for beloved Jesus. Well, we do get a **little glimpse of that appreciation**.

As Jesus reclines at their table, **Martha** serves - her usual role. **Lazarus** joins the rest of the men in eating- as was their custom. **Mary** did the **unusual**. Mary did the **way out**. **Mary** proceeded to **anoint Jesus' feet** with costly perfume. That was a little strange because usually hosts anointed the **heads** of their guests with a **little perfume**. She used a **pound** of **costly perfume** on his **feet**. How costly? "**Three hundred denarii's worth**," – that translates into almost a year's pay for the average worker in those days. "**Appreciation**" you say? If that wasn't strange enough, Mary let **her hair down** and used it to dry Jesus feet after the perfume anointing. What she did with her hair was totally unacceptable for that day. For a woman to let her hair down in public was shocking, reserved only for the privacy of one's own bedroom. There was so much perfume that the whole house was **filled with its fragrance**. Some commentators suggest that this scent would have clung to Jesus for several days, maybe even up to the day of his actual death on the cross...

**Judas**, one of Jesus' disciples was also a guest at the dinner, as were the others. When Judas witnessed Mary's totally shocking actions, he rose in criticism, "**Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?**" John's Gospel goes on to note that Judas didn't really care about the poor. Rather, he was the treasurer for Jesus and his little group and used to steal the money in their common purse. He, we are told, was a **thief**. **Do you suppose Jesus knew that?** John also tells us that Judas was the disciple who was **about to betray Jesus**. **Do you suppose Jesus knew that?** Jesus tells Judas that he knows of his betrayal during their celebration of the Passover a few days later, the "**Last Supper**." He also tells **Peter** that he will deny Jesus. He tells the **rest of the disciples** that they will run away and hide at Jesus' final hour. **Jesus knew...**

Do you think that **Mary** had any clue that her anointing of Jesus' feet gave just a little **glimpse of Jesus' kneeling** a few days later to **wash the disciples' feet**? Do you suppose that she had any notion that she was beginning the traditional anointing of the **Jewish burial process**? Did **Judas** really get that he was a disciple of the **Living Lord of all Creation**? Did **Peter** have any notion that Jesus really did hold **power over sin, death and evil**?

**Could things have gone differently?** Did **Mary** have to share her life and extravagant gift of love and **appreciation for Jesus**? Did **Judas** have to use his life and other people's money **only for himself**? Did Judas have to sell Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver? Could Judas even have come back afterward and received forgiveness from Jesus? **Peter** and the other ten were readily forgiven and restored to Jesus and to his mission of love and care for this world and its fickle people. Among Jesus' last words echoing down from that cross were these. **"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."** **What was Jesus thinking** about Mary, about Judas, about us, as he hung suspended over that crowd?

After Jesus' death, Judas took his own life – two accounts. In one account he **"hanged himself"**. In the other account he **"fell head-long on his sword"**. Either way, he committed **suicide**. In Minnesota, during 2010, 600 people committed suicide. There has long been a **crisis line phone system** set up in Minnesota where people can call for emergency counsel and help to prevent suicides. A little over a year ago, a pilot program was launched in seven northeastern Minnesota counties. It is named **"TXT4Life"** and is aimed especially at teens. It is a text messaging system set up to provide immediate connection for suicidal people with counselors who can text them through their crisis and get them hooked up with professional help. In this first year, an **average of 400 people has used the text system** each month compared to an average of **15 phone calls per month** from throughout the state. Already texts are coming in from all over Minnesota even though the program has been promoted only in northeastern Minnesota. Now the legislature is considering a bill to implement the system statewide. **Is God watching over this life-saving work?**

Perhaps God's greatest mistake in creating humans – **was to give us the freedom to live our lives in the way that we see fit...** Mary, Judas, you and me – **as we see fit...**

Jesus told Judas to **“Leave her alone. She bought the perfume 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.”** Jesus wasn’t telling his followers not to worry about the poor. Jesus wasn’t saying, **“Forget the poor, you’ll never be able to get rid of poverty.”** Jesus was saying, **“This week I die for you and for all. When I rise again, the world will be a different place – for the poor, for the sick, for the grieving, for thieves, for rich people, for children, for the elderly...”**

**Is our world different because Jesus lives in our hearts, lives and days?** Is Jesus **watching, waiting, for the right moment** to come again and make all things right? Can things be different for the **poor**? Can they be any different for **you and me**?

Is Jesus hovering, watching over all of this? Up there beyond those snowy clouds, down here in the deepest part of our hearts, **is Jesus waiting to see what we will do before he comes again?**

Perhaps God’s greatest mistake in creating humans – was to give us the freedom to live our lives in the way that we see fit... Mary, Judas, you and me – **as we see fit...**

I hope that the emergency helicopter was able to help whoever was in trouble.

Come Lord Jesus and be our guest. **Help us to live well as your people.** Thanks be to God. Amen.