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Lenten Midweek 3
February 28, 2018
John 12:1-8
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

[Adapted from Rev. Brent Kuhlman's sermon series in *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, Vol. 27, Part 2 (Concordia: St. Louis), 56-58.]

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Bethany dinner party. Jesus is the guest of honor. After all, he is the Savior. Martha dishes up the mashed potatoes and prime rib. She pours the Zinfandel. Recently-raised-from-dead-by-Jesus Lazarus is at the table. All of a sudden, Mary breaks out the most expensive of her ointments imported from the East. A whole pound's worth. Its magnificent and extravagant fragrance fills the entire house.

You know the verse in Psalm 23: "Thou anointest my head with oil." But Mary pours it all over Jesus' feet and wipes it off with her hair.

Mary isn't stingy. She doesn't hold back. She generously and deliberately anoints Jesus with her one-of-a-kind, pure, genuine, precious, super-expensive anointing oil. It's what you'd normally put on a dead body right before you bury it to honor the deceased. She may have used some when she buried Lazarus.

What's with her anointing Jesus with oil for dead people? Is she crazy? No. She gives one of her most precious possessions to honor Jesus! For who He is and what He's come to do for her, you, the entire world! Jesus is going to do a Good Friday to give His divine body into cruciform death as the atoning sacrifice for all sin and every sinner. Soon, His divine body will be dead and buried! So she humbly and lovingly anoints it because soon His body will be given into death for her salvation—and yours. She knows just how precious sinners are to the Lord Jesus, who has come to die for her. No wonder her faith in Him is exhibited through such love and thanksgiving as she anoints His feet with the pricey ointment and then wipes it from His feet with her hair.

Then there's Judas, called Iscariot. The total opposite of Mary. He blasts her and lets her have it. But in a very pious way, of course. "Oh, Mary! You poor, poor dear! What a waste! As Chief Financial Officer in charge of Jesus Ministry Inc., I know a thing or two about fiscal responsibility. What you've just done is such a shame! A monetary calamity! You meant well, but you should have donated that high-priced oil to Jesus Ministry Inc. I would have

sold it to the highest bidder and given the hefty proceeds to Bethany's street people, the homeless, the battered, the abused, the orphaned, and the unemployed. You could have been part of something greater! Community building! Community transformation! With all that cash, we could make Bethany a better place to live. And just imagine how much street cred and props Jesus Ministry Inc. would get!"

Sounds really good, doesn't it? However, behind all the pious talk, Judas doesn't give a rip about the poor. Or about Jesus. He's all about helping himself. Enriching himself at Mary's expense.

He's been at it for quite some time. He's been embezzling, misappropriating funds, and stealing from Jesus Ministry Inc. John, as he writes our text, see through it for us: "Having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put in it." Judas was a thief! His pious talk was all a sham as he quietly but relentlessly padded his Swiss and Mediterranean offshore bank accounts.

In fact, CFO Judas will soon make a dastardly deal for cash to betray Jesus into the hands of His enemies that leads directly to Jesus' death. What a fraud! What a big time Seventh Commandment breaker! He couldn't care less how much his theft deeply hurt people—Mary, his fellow disciples, or even Jesus!

You know what God forbids in the Seventh Commandment—and also what He commands. Let's recite it together:

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.

Yes, with the Seventh Commandment, God wants you to help people, to serve them, to improve and protect your neighbor's possessions and income instead of stealing, burglarizing, or robbing them. In the Seventh Commandment, God wants you to love your neighbor. Stealing harms, hurts, and injures your neighbor. Again, take the example of Judas Iscariot. More for you at the painful expense of your neighbor is a sin—not only against the one from whom you steal, but it's rank rebellion and transgression against God.

You believe the lie that robbery or theft—from grand to petty—is no big deal. You believe the propaganda that there's no-harm-no-foul when you cheat your neighbor at school, in your family, or in your community. You play the video game *Grand Theft Auto*. You've become numb to the horrific nature of stealing as well as other wicked sins that usually go with it. (Remember the story of King Ahab and the sins that went into his taking of Naboth's vineyard?) Husbands steal from their wives when they withhold love from their wives, and wives steal from their husbands when they do the same. Kids steal from their parents when they don't honor them. When you don't give what you should give to one another—yes, also things like love, honor, or respect—that, too, is stealing!

Consequently, stealing is so common, so ordinary, so expected among you that you don't even think twice about it. You lose no sleep. You don't even blink an eye. No pangs of conscience trouble you when you steal in whatever way. It's just a matter of fact, expected, a way of life. It's what people do. So what's the big deal?

I'll tell you what the big deal is! Your stealing (from chronic to occasional), the hurtful and deliberate harming of your neighbor, reveals a much bigger dilemma, in fact, the biggest crisis in your life. What is that? You do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things. The First Commandment again. You don't believe that God is for you to take care of you in everything. You steal because you don't believe that God is for you. You steal because you don't trust that God will provide for you. And so you callously and fanatically steal with your heart, your mouth, and your hands. I'm here to tell you that is hellaciously disastrous.

And you'd better repent of such unbelief and repent of the stealing that flows from your breaking of the First Commandment. Confess your sin. Admit it. Take responsibility. Don't deny it anymore. Quit blaming others. Stop the stealing. Knock it off.

And most especially, believe that God is for you in Jesus, His Son, the Savior of Seventh and First Commandment sinners. So much is God for you in Jesus that—dare I say it?—yes, I think I will. I'm in a Gospel-ly audacious mood. Here goes:

SO MUCH IS GOD *FOR YOU IN JESUS* THAT JESUS BECOMES *THE* IDENTITY "THIEF."

Yes, that's right, I said it. *The* identity "thief" par excellence!

What do I mean? I'm not saying that Jesus sinned. He never sinned. But what I am saying is that for you and for your salvation, Jesus calculatingly and intentionally took your identity. He broke through all your security measures and identity-theft protection, and he

“stole” your identity from you. That is to say, as Jesus was hung on the cross by the Roman soldiers, He “was numbered with the transgressors” and He was made “to be sin who knew no sin” because He was truly carrying all your sin in His divine, sinless body. He flat out took all your sin away from you! Stubbornly but graciously “stole” it all from you! He wrapped Himself in the totality of all your sin! He robbed every bit of it from your body and then bore it in His!

Why? So that God the Father would treat Him, not you, as the sinner who deserves all of God’s divine wrath and eternal damnation. This is what it takes to save you, the sinner. Listen carefully. Jesus becomes the sinner and gets treated as the sinner with the world’s sin and yours that He’s taken from you!

Identity-theft Jesus redeems you from the curse of the Law by “becoming a curse for” you on His Good Friday cross.

Identity-theft Jesus is “numbered with the transgressors” and “he who knew no sin was made to be sin.” And so He cries out with a loud voice with all the sin and its damning consequences that He took from you: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Well, since identity-theft Jesus has taken all your sin, your sin, remarkably and wonderfully, doesn’t belong to you anymore. Seriously, it’s all forgiven. Not counted against you. Salvation is yours!

And now, because of Jesus, you have a new identity. You are a new creation, a believer. You are a saint, a holy one. Not because of your own holiness, but because of the holiness and perfection of Jesus given to you in His forgiveness.

Now, brothers and sisters, as you have good use of the Lord’s forgiveness, He has ample use for you, His believers and saints, in the world as His own hands and mouth. To deny yourself in order to help people—to love people without counting the cost. To improve and protect your neighbor’s money and possessions. Not to pull a Judas Iscariot but rather to give self-sacrificially and abundantly like Mary. You’re free to do that because salvation is yours in Jesus! And the Lord Jesus will provide you with tons of opportunities to love and help many people in the way of the Seventh Commandment. Happy doing just that!

In the name of Jesus.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in + Christ Jesus.