

Discipleship 6

16/07/17 11:15 Baptism

Have you ever received an expensive or extravagant gift? **[collect examples]**

I remember the occasion when a good friend of mine was greeted by her parents out of the blue with a set of car keys in their hand, and a new car waiting outside. "For me? A car"! The feeling of not deserving it, or of being loved so much.

But extravagant gifts might also provoke a suspicion of motives. Think of the large donation to an political party, trying perhaps to buy influence.

Extravagance with money towards us might also provoke in us the wrong feelings about money and its enticing power over us.

So a woman named Mary got hold of some expensive perfume, and lavished it over Jesus' feet. We can only speculate on why she did it, but certainly there were those around Jesus who thought that the perfume should have been sold and the money used for better purposes like feeding the poor. So, what do you think - should the perfume have been sold, or used as it was to anoint Jesus' feet?

In the last few weeks our churches have been thinking about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ - we call that being a disciple. This week, we are thinking how following Jesus calls us to put our faith into action. Mary couldn't help herself - in Jesus she had found acceptance and love. She had done many things that had got her into trouble in Jewish society, but by knowing Jesus her life was transformed. Lavishing him with an expensive gift of oil was her way of doing something in response. Her faith in him called her to do something for Jesus.

So for all of us that are baptised Christians - followers of Jesus Christ - are called similarly to a life of service of others. And a life recognising in ourselves and others the way we are already serving God. The teacher who works in their own time preparing a lesson that will only last an hour, before it is gone and forgotten. The choir who practice for weeks for an hours performance. A number of us here work in many ways in the community. Might we recognise that in doing so we are reflecting the love of God to those around us? And might God still be calling us to new ways in which to reflect our faith in him by what we do?

As Oliver comes to his baptism today, he joins that large group of people called disciples - people throughout the world, and throughout time, who have proclaimed a desire to follow Jesus Christ. He might not yet know it, but that faith will grow in him over time if you his family and friends help him by teaching him the Christian faith, reading to him the bible, and helping him learn to pray. We are ready here to help you with that in any way we can. As Oliver grows up, and grows in faith, the call of God to serve others will come to him, as it does to all of us. The second reading from the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament tells us of what God desires of all humans: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the things that weigh people down, to let the oppressed go free, to share our bread with hungry, and to look after the homeless. This is Oliver's calling, as with every disciples. Our prayer is that you will encourage Oliver in that calling. And we too, his family, friends and members of this congregation have mostly received this calling too at our baptism. Today, the call of God might once again be stirred in us. In a moment I will ask Oliver's parents and godparents, "Do you turn to Christ as Saviour". In baptism we turn to follow Jesus Christ. And for those of us who have been baptised, that is the promise we made or which was made on our behalf. Even if we have not nurtured that faith, we might

today in the stillness of our hearts declare that we want to follow Jesus Christ - even if we don't know how to do that (talk to me privately if you want to know more about how to do that).

Our world has so many needs, and peoples lives can be transformed by the generosity of people towards one another. We have seen that in the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower. Might Oliver and us all be encouraged by our discipleship of Jesus Christ to look beyond ourselves and our immediate family to generously and extravagantly look to serve those around us.