

**Sermon for Sunday, April 3, 2022**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
**“Offering Love”**  
**Rev. Amy Zalk Larson**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Decorah, Iowa**

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

This week I got to witness this story happening again. I got to see a woman anoint the body of Christ, as Mary of Bethany did long ago. I was gathered with a part of the body of Christ, members of the Northeastern Iowa Synod of our ELCA. People shared honestly about pain in the church today. We named the racism, sexism, homophobia that plague us. We lamented what we have lost during the pandemic, the ways old patterns of being church are dying. God brings life out of death, but it's hard in this in-between time when the old is dying and the new is not yet emerging. Many expressed the feeling that we can never do enough or be enough in the face of all that is wrong, all that is broken in our world today. Tempers flared.

And then a young pastor, Pastor Laurel Meester, stood up to speak. As she spoke, hope and love washed over me and so many of us in the room. She said, “I’m thinking of Mary of Bethany. In the face of death, she offered what she had for Jesus. She showed him love. Others judged her; Judas critiqued her - she’s not doing enough for the poor. Yet, Jesus received her offering and honored it. What she did helped him offer his life for the world.”

And you, Pastor Laurel, said to us, “You can offer what you have. You can show love. You can give and trust that Jesus will receive what you bring without judgment and critique, that Jesus will use what you offer for God’s work in the world. As she spoke, the body of Christ gathered there was anointed, anointed with love, with hope. I could take a deep breath again. I could release the butterflies that had been crashing into each other in my stomach. In the face of pain, this young pastor poured out such love for the body of Christ.

The story of a woman anointing Jesus is so important. It is told by each of the Gospel writers. Each tells it a little differently. John says it was Mary who anointed Jesus’s feet. The other three say an unnamed woman anointed his head but affirm the woman’s action even more robustly. In those Gospel accounts, Jesus proclaims, “She has shown great love, she has done a great service, she has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.” In Matthew and Mark Jesus says, “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.”

This story is central to the account of Jesus’ death and resurrection, yet it is often not told the way Jesus said it should be. Yet this week I witnessed again how much we need to remember and relive this story. The body of Christ needs to be anointed again and again with the love displayed by this woman. We need the hope her story offers. We need to follow her example.

There is so much pain, so much death, so much despair in so many spaces today. The old is dying and the new is not yet emerging. Can we do enough, be enough? How then shall we live? Offer love. Do what you can. Jesus will receive it, Jesus will bless it, Jesus will use it in the work of bringing new life.

This week I heard about a twelve year old (in our congregation) who is doing what he can, offering his love in the face of all the pain of the Ukrainians. When this boy heard about Russia's invasion, he took out his beloved Duplo building blocks and made Ukrainian flags out of the yellow and blue blocks. He then committed that he won't break those flags apart until the war ends. This boy uses his Duplo blocks regularly. He pays close attention to detail and builds accurate, masterful creations. Yellow and blue usually figure prominently in his realistic projects. But in this act of love, he is committing to remember and honor the people of Ukraine each day. Learning of this offering, this act of love, has helped me to commit to pray and give for Ukraine for the long haul.

If you look outside our sanctuary today you will see offerings of toothbrushes and washcloths given to make Personal Care Kits for Lutheran World Relief. Right now, care kits collected last Lent are helping to anoint Christ's body in Ukraine, Poland, Hungary and in refugee camps around the world.

And there are so many ways we anoint the body of Christ closer to home with prayer shawls and service on committees and musical offerings and ushering and meals brought and the cards you send to say thank you for being the cantor or I am praying for you. I remember after my husband Matt's car accident all the care and love. One of the most memorable offerings was someone who sent boxes of candy and microwave popcorn and the encouragement to have a family movie night. "Do something fun, laugh," the card said, "that's important for healing, too."

Offer love. Do what you can. Jesus will receive it, Jesus will bless it, Jesus will use it in the work of bringing new life. Here today, Jesus pours out love upon your beloved body, upon you who are an essential part of the body of Christ.

Here, words of love and promise wash over you.

Songs of hope bathe you in life.

Bread and wine, the body of Christ, are given for you.

Extravagant, abundant, fragrant love is showered upon you.

Because of this love you are enough, you have enough to do what you can and give what you have.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.