**Exodus 3:1-15**

 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.

 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up."

 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

 12 He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

 13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

 15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title forever, and this my title for all generations.

**Psalm 95**

**1** O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

 3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

 6 O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

 8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

 9 when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

 10 For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways."

 11 Therefore in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest."

**John 12:1-8**

 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,

 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"

 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.

 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

**SERMON – Call to Worship**

I recently had a conversation with someone about worship. Why do we do certain things in worship, and does it even make sense to do certain things. If I am honest, I do have a certain love for some of the traditions of worship, so this conversation really made me think. I get that some of the language we use, is in some ways really archaic, and stems back to the 4th century or so. But something about the liturgy goes to the heart of worship.

Now, don’t get me wrong, even though I like some of the hymns, I long for more modern songs at times. Even though the liturgy works, I also know that it is not what everyone is interested in. Even though I long for different ways to worship at times, there is something special about how we do things and why we do them. The way we worship, says something about what we believe. About how we see God… About how we come to God; about how we devote the time here to God.

So, we are starting a series on “why we do what we do” in worship. I figured, if we know why we do what we do, then it becomes easier to talk about what and how we want to change things to make the whole thing more meaningful for everyone. And yes, this is an invitation for conversation and thoughts and ideas; and hopefully this will start it.

First comes the “call to worship”. Maybe I should have stuck with my initial thought of just doing 5-minute teaching sessions, because now I realize that finding texts to support these ideas for good sermons are not that easy. The Psalms are full of ideas about worship, but how do we talk about the call to worship. Psalm 95 talks about worship, and it tells us that it is indeed God that calls us to worship, and this call is simply "come”; a call that goes out to the people of God - to "us." And the place of worship to which we are invited to come is into the very presence of God. But I guess we all already knew that.

This made me think of Moses. You know, the story of God talking to him out of a burning bush. We talked about that story before. This time, I would like to emphasis that God told him to take his shoes off, because he was standing on holy ground. This really stopped me in my tracks. When God calls us into his presence, we step onto holy ground…. Do we ever think about it that way? Do we ever consider that where we are now is holy – in the presence of God, even today sharing the Lord’s Supper?

Because, the thing is, God calls us to worship out of the muck of our everyday, too-busy schedules. He calls us out of the chaos of work schedules, errands that need to be run, rambunctious kids that need to be in three different places at the same time, our lack-of-leisure-time lives, out of our grief and brokenness into this holy place to worship him. With all the burdens of life, we may have a hard time switching gears to get into the right mindset to worship in spirit and truth. In a day and age where so many distractions are fighting for our attention, one of the best ways we can help center our hearts is through the call to worship. It urges us to turn from worldly distractions and set our minds, hearts, and attention on the glory of God, to the holy place we enter.

Why are we called? Because He is a "Great God." He is extreme, vast, magnificent, and so much more that makes him indescribable. He is the Owner of everything from the deepest valleys to the highest hills - all the land and all the sea. He is the Creator of all that is; and for that matter you and me. And this God is especially fond of each of you. He wants you to stop for a while and focus on him. Not because he needs his ego boosted or something, but because he loves you. He wants you to stop for a while to sings songs of praise and hymns of adoration, to confess the burden of your sin and guilt and leave it behind, to hear from him from his Word, to talk to him in your prayers and to be blessed by him. Even to have fellowship with him and each other in his company, like we will experience today. To stop and build relationship, like you would with a good friend.

Worship is ultimately then, more than a command…it is our response to a holy God. It is the response to a God that loves you so that he sent his only Son to die an excruciating death on a cross so that we can live. It is the response to a God who wants you to be in relationship with her, to get to know her and to allow her to heal you. It is the response to the hunger in your soul that cries out to the God who knows you inside and out, and without who we cannot take the next step.

Why do we do it? To me, this is where Mary enters the story. Mary of Bethany who was sitting at Jesus’ feet, while her sister Martha was working to entertain the guests that showed up at their house. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who died because Jesus took his sweet time to get there when they called for help. Mary, the sister of Lazarus who was raised from the dead by Jesus. Mary, who we meet again now, when Jesus stops by on his way to Jerusalem, who anoints Jesus’ feet out of deep devotion.

And yes, we can look at this as the anointing of Jesus for his death, and all the rest of the explanations, but for today, I want you to focus on what she did. We are not a 100% sure, but I am willing to take a wild guess, that she was so enamored with Jesus for raising her brother, and for just being a good friend, that she took the most expensive thing in the home, and “wasted” it on Jesus. She broke the little jar and poured its contents on Jesus’ feet. And then she proceeds to wipe his feet dry with her hair. It was very expensive perfume – 300 denarii’s worth – the cost of a year’s wages for the average worker, that she poured out. In today’s terms, probably around $40,000. The extravagant nature of the gift is underscored by the fact that the fragrance filled the entire house. Mary’s is an act of total abandonment to Jesus.

Mary knew gratitude. It was with deep appreciation for Jesus that she gave all she had to Jesus. But then, how do you put a price on the gift of restored life? How can you offer the one who gave you life, the one who brought hope in a hopeless situation anything less than everything you are and have? This was more than devotion. This was worship, and worship flows not out of a heart of obligation but of gratitude.

Did this expression of worship cost Mary something? Oh, yes! Sure, it cost her financially, but then, I think it might also have cost her her honor. The text says she wiped his feet with her hair…in a public setting. This was no simple cultural faux pas. This was an outright disregard for all social and cultural norms. You see, the only person who was allowed to see a grown woman with her hair down was the woman’s husband. Mary risked being branded as an immoral woman for the rest of her life by her actions this day.

What is your most valuable possession? Probably something different from a bottle of perfume. But there is something that is very precious to you. It's different for everybody. Is it the desire to succeed? Is it your self-image? A bank account? Your house or car? Would you or could you give it for Jesus? Would you allow your children, for example, to leave the standard of life that you have created for them by giving to those who work in discouraging places for a better world? Would you be willing to go yourself? Would you consider giving more than the designated one-tenth of your income to God? How about giving up some of your time to give it to a greater cause? Or maybe opening your home and privacy to someone who had nowhere to go? How extravagant is your love? How thankful are you for what you have received – life in abandon? Or do we just go through the motions – singing hymns, uttering prayers, halfway listening to me on a Sunday morning? But then do you love others in the way that Jesus loved--as much as you love yourself? Do you make a place for the outcast, the rejected, the oppressed, the homeless, the victimized and marginalized souls whom Jesus loves? Remember, our whole lives are an expression of worship – more than just saying "I love you", and by coming to church, we worship daily by our actions to the least of these.

One more thing – it says, “*And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”* Mary’s act of worship made everything smell good. The house, Jesus, as he went off to Jerusalem, and Mary, everywhere she went, I am sure you noticed. After-all, she wiped his feet with her hair. The blessing given to Jesus ended up shared with other people.

I wonder if we’ve lost the wonder of worship. We forget that worship is the first task of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and it is the first task of the body of Christ. Worship is what we do! Worship is not to be convenient, but costly. God calls us onto holy ground. But so much more, God calls us into relationship – to spend time to get to know her. To spend time because there is no greater God – a creator God, a saving God, a God who gives life and walks with us through life. We worship, because of this indescribable gift. We give up prized possessions and ourselves out of thankfulness for what God has done for us. We spend time, as with a good friend, because it is so vitally important.

Mary shows us the way. For her act here was a model of discipleship we all should emulate. She washed his feet because she wanted to. We are called to worship in the same way. To refocus our attention away from our everyday worries, and focus all we have on the God of the universe; of indescribable, giving love. Why do we worship? Because we’re asked to worship, or because we want to worship? It does make a difference.

I want to end with a quote from Dennis Ignatius (a Malaysian diplomat and Christian): "When we lift our hands in praise and worship, we break spiritual jars of perfume over Jesus. The fragrance of our praise fills the whole earth and touches the heart of God." This is why we are called to worship… This is why we come.