

Series: Unlikely Encounters

At the Party

Lamentations 3:19-24, John 12:1-11, John 16:33

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Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, March 22, 2026

Good morning. A reading from John 12:1-11: “Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here, a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with fragrance of the perfume, but one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected: ‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold, and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’ He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. ‘Leave her alone,’ Jesus replied. It is intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.’ Meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of Him, but also to see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. So, the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of many, the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in Him,” the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Kaci: How is everyone doing? How are you? Before we dive into the text and the message, I just want to take a second and honor your pastor, Pastor Paul. Can we just give it up for your pastor? That he wants to bring in different voices that, yeah, you are just thinking so thoughtfully and deeply about this house, and so for me, it has been fun to be able to be friends with someone a little bit older, much older. No, I am just kidding. I am kidding, but I call him Pastor Paul, because back home I have a mentor, and he is an eighty-year-old man. He was a pastor his whole career, and we always call him Pastor Paul because the alliteration sounds amazing, and so I always call him Pastor Paul, and he is like, “We are peers. Like, just call me Paul,” and I am like, I don’t know, a little bit older than me. I did not have an epiphany that you looked like the Capital One guy. Has anyone else had that epiphany? You’re welcome. I was watching TV the other day, and the commercial came on, and I was like, “Pastor Paul, the Capital One guy.”

My name is Casey. I am from California. I have been in Denver for about six years. I love it out here. I absolutely love it, and I know some of you are mourning the lack of winter, not me. I have been really enjoying this, but I just want to say thanks for having me, and so let’s dive in. The text that was just read, we are going to get to eventually, but within that text, it says, “therefore Mary poured out her perfume,” and whenever you see a “therefore” in scripture, it is always important to ask yourself, “What is that there for?” and so Mary pouring out perfume, the scripture, Jesus finding Himself at this party means that this party is actually a response to an event that happened right before, and so the party that was just read about, Jesus and Lazarus, Mary, Martha reclining, the perfume poured out, all the things that were just read to you, finds itself situated in between arguably Jesus’ greatest miracle apart from his own death and resurrection, Him raising Lazarus from the dead, and then right before Jesus goes into Passion Week and suffers greatly and eventually ends up on the cross.

So, we look at this party and its situation, and I think within the party there is a tension, as I was studying, that was posed, and I think we find this tension in this scripture. John 16:33, and some of you will hear this scripture, and you will think to yourself, "I have heard this a million times. I have written this down in my Bible. I have written it on my arm. I have texted this scripture to somebody, and it reads like this, "here on Earth," and this is Jesus gathering his disciples, and at this point in John, Jesus is being weirdly cryptic about the fact that He is going to die, and He is talking about it within parables, and the disciples are like, "You can't go. Are you going to die? But you are going to rise?" and there is some confusion. Jesus is continually trying to communicate to his disciples about who He is. Now, we have the luxury of understanding this scripture within the context of his death and resurrection. The disciples did not have this luxury at the time, and so they hear Jesus say this, and they hear it probably with a mix of sorrow and joy, and then ultimately some confusion. Jesus says this, "Here on Earth, you will have many trials and sorrows." Yikes, "but take heart, because I have overcome the world."

Now us as Christians, we give a round of applause. We are like, "Yeah, He did. Come on, Jesus overcame the world. Yeah, many sorrows, troubles. It is fine but take heart. Come on, look what Jesus did." Now for them, what they hear is their teacher, their rabbi, giving them two different promises side by side, one reality. "In this world, you will have many trials and sorrows." Yikes. Thanks, Jesus. That feels good to hear, "But take heart. I have overcome the world." Two promises, one reality, and what I see happening nowadays within my own heart and within the discipleship of believers of all different ages is this oscillation between an emphasis of one promise over the other in the face of suffering, so I like to think of it like this.

Does anybody who is too cheap to get cable still have commercials on their TV? Me too. Okay, so I got Peacock, five dollars more a month for the non-commercial version. Not doing it. That is a latte. I am paying off student loans. I have things to do, money to save, and so before I go to bed every night, I just plop on an episode of The Office. It is my palate cleanser. It lulls me right to sleep, Michael Scott, and immediately a commercial pops up, and I do not know if my Internet or my Wi-Fi had heard that my skin has been dryer living in Denver, but it is always an eczema commercial. It is always a drug commercial for eczema, and I am just lying there watching this commercial, and as all of us know who have lived on the planet and watched TV for any amount of time, drug commercials have this way of making it seem like this one drug that is supposed to be for eczema is going to literally solve all of your life problems and bring joy and order back to your home. Your kids will never fight again. It is talking about the benefits of eczema medicine, and there is a woman at a dance thing, and her husband is cooking at home. It is presenting this good life, and if you know how the drug commercial comes to an end, there is always this moment where you see the joy on the screen and picture it within a church context. There is like a culture video, and people are getting baptized. You can see the water droplets in the air, and at Red Rocks, star videos are like all in slow-motion, high-definition, and I am like, "Wow, I really was a part of that baptism. The hands are being raised at the retreat." You see all the winds of God, and then imagine Pastor Paul at the very end, in this context, Jesus, and then the eczema commercial, some random dude comes in quickly, as fast as he can, with the side effects. For Jesus in this text, "It is going to be super, super hard, but I have taken over. I have overcome. Take courage. By the way, you're going to have a lot of trials, and it is still going to be pretty hard, and I have overcome, but I we are in the here and now,

but not yet, and heaven will come one day, but you will suffer, and there will be many tears,” and Jesus did die, and imagine that coming up on your culture video, the side effects over and over, one after the other, and so we have this tension as believers, and so the overemphasis on, “Here on Earth, you will have many trials and sorrows,” sometimes within ourselves, if we overemphasize and camp out on this truth, we can do something that I have coined, and a lot of people have coined, and we have been hearing around the church culture for a while now, called spiritually bypass.

Now, before I talk about us doing this externally, I actually find first and foremost, if we have a tendency to spiritually bypass externally, it means that we have a tendency to do it internally, so it is our disposition towards our own suffering and struggles. The definition is overemphasizing spiritual truths in a way that avoids or minimizes the reality of suffering. It is this grand celebration of the tomb and the resurrection and the victory, but a bypassing of the suffering and the road to the cross.

Now, I see this with some levity. In college, I had a friend, Allison Hensley, nicest girl you would ever want to meet, one of those Christian girls who was so nice that you knew the first guy that she dated she was going to marry, whether she wanted to or not, because she could not break up with anybody. There was no way that was happening, but she was a college athlete, and so we had lost a soccer game, and her boyfriend, Mark, was the nicest guy you would ever want to meet, but he’s an orchestra guy, not an athlete, so he really missed some cues, and so she was the goalkeeper. We lost 5-0, and if you have kids, if anyone has played sports, you know that it is always that awkward walk up to them after they lost. You are like, “So what are we getting for lunch? Like, we are not going to talk about this,” and Mark and Allison were on the road to get married. He was going to propose in the next week. Good things were on the horizon. The game ends. She is devastated. It is her fault, 5-0 if you are a goalkeeper. Can’t really blame the rest of the team. No offense, and he comes up to her, and he is as happy as can be to see his future bride, and he says, “All right, what is for lunch? How are we doing? At least it is a nice day. At least you did not get injured. Hey, at least your team’s, at least, at least, at least.” How many of you hate “at least”? The next day, Allison dumped Mark in what was the most shocking turn of events to all of us, and she just said to us, “I can’t marry someone who just says, ‘at least’ whenever I am struggling and suffering. I need to marry someone who can sit with me, marry someone who can just nod their head and say, ‘That is hard.’”

I know some of us in this church, and maybe some of us, I know I have been on the delivering end of well-meaning resurrection truth in the face of somebody who is devastated. I had a friend who had a miscarriage, and somebody well-meaning came up to her in the church lobby and said, “Well, at least you will have another. There is an angel in heaven waiting for you.” Now, is that true? Maybe, but was that an appropriate response to her current reality? Absolutely not, and so sometimes we can spiritually bypass ourselves, ignore truth and suffering, because we want to get to the tomb so bad, the resurrection, and so the appropriate response to that reality is not to bypass the suffering. It is actually to sit in it. Jesus, we will get to later, appropriately responds to both, and I think we can be believers that do that to ourselves and to others.

The second part of this overemphasis is this emphasis on suffering. I call it emotional bypass, so the overemphasizing of the reality of suffering in a way that ignores or dismisses the truth of God, an intense focus on the cross, but it stays there and downplays or refuses to lift up the reality of the victory of the resurrection. When I learned about this concept of lament and sadness, I was really over this idea,

“choose joy,” and “at least,” and so I moved from a Christian who was all about victory and ignoring your feelings and not sitting in your suffering, and I swung all the way to this other side where I was like the Debbie Downer from Saturday Night Live in small group, and then someone would be like, “I am engaged,” and I would be like, “What about all the people who are not?” Like, I would just come in so hot. “Oh, I got a raise.” “What about people that can’t get a job?” Like, and that is true, right? That is sad. That is hard, but I would meet this person’s moment of victory, this person who is contending for a miracle, with sorrow and sadness and comparison and bitterness, and this was also an inappropriate response to the reality that maybe God answered a prayer, that maybe God gave them a miracle, that maybe the thing that they were contending for happened. Praise Jesus, and so I found myself in this other disposition, and so the question that I have for us is how do we respond appropriately to both promises that Jesus lays out, but one reality, that there is suffering, that there needs to be appropriate response to that suffering, but then Jesus has overcome, and that the end of suffering is not a period, but an exclamation point, that the end of suffering is not a funeral, but a banquet when Jesus wipes away every single tear., so what is the appropriate response? How do we follow Jesus in our messy middles?

We are going to get to John 12, but before we do that, I want us to camp out in John 11, so that we can understand John 12 better. So, we are going to zoom into this scene right before where we see Jesus responding to suffering, and so we can learn from our Savior, but also I want us to zoom into John 11, because Jesus has a moment of suffering that is deeply personal to Him. Lazarus, He just got news that Lazarus was sick, but Jesus knew deep down, and the reason we are not going to read a lot of John 11 is because I do not have time. If we could be here for two hours, I would just take you line by line in John 11. So, you can circle back around and dive into that on your own time, but Jesus finds out that Lazarus has died, and the disciples are like, “Jesus, people want to stone you, and they know that Laz is like your bestie.” I am just going to call him Laz. “He is your bestie, and so if we go to Laz, and we go to the tomb, people are going to stone you. People want to kill you,” and Jesus waves them off immediately, and I love this about Jesus. It is throughout the gospels, namely, you will see it in Luke. It is a gospel that is more focused on compassion, but Jesus is always moving towards people that are suffering. He does not run away from suffering. Suffering does not bring Him discomfort. He is not afraid that He will lose his life over the suffering of others. Jesus is drawn and moves towards our suffering.

So, Jesus says, “We have to go,” and then He gets there, and Martha and Mary are devastated, and they are in the house mourning with some other Jewish people, and Martha immediately meets Jesus out by the tomb. Now, there is a line in John 11 that says, “Mary stayed in the house.” Mary needed a second. Mary was devastated. Mary needed a moment before she met Jesus, but Martha finds Jesus, and she says, “Lord, if you had been here, he would not have died,” and I do not know if you have had a moment like this before our Savior. “Where were you? How could this have happened? If you had been here?” and Jesus stands there, and He has a conversation with Martha, and then we dive into a text where He eventually ends up calling out for Mary, and Mary responds like this in John 11:32 in the NIV. She runs out to Jesus, and it says, “When she reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died,’ and when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ Jesus asked. ‘Come and see,’ Lord, they replied, and then we get to verse 35,

which is the shortest verse in the Bible, and if you are a youth student, congratulations for memorizing it. They always would be like, “Guess what I just memorized.” I am like, okay, “Good start,” in what I think is one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible that differentiates our God from any other God, a God that came down, a God that says Emmanuel, God with us, a verse that is such good news for us who are suffering and for us who will go on to suffer. “Jesus wept.” Jesus weeps. He weeps because Laz is his friend, and it is personal for Him, but He also weeps because they are a collateral damage to suffering and sin and death, and Jesus’ response is incredibly appropriate. He weeps. Now, He weeps knowing He will go on to resurrect Lazarus, which means He weeps as an appropriate response, knowing that this suffering will soon end, so you see that Jesus in our suffering, He moves towards it. He sees it.

I love that Mary is so honest with Jesus. I do not know if I would feel the same with somebody I really respect. It is hard to voice disappointment or frustration, but Mary falls at his feet and says, “Where were you? You should have been there,” and Jesus is not threatened by that. Jesus is not made disrespected by that. Jesus stands there, and it says in the text, He is deeply troubled, deeply moved by what Mary is going through, and so He sees it, and then He feels it, and then He goes on, after weeping and appropriately responding to Mary’s suffering, and He Himself allowing space to suffer at something devastating. He goes on, and I do not know how He made this transition, to be quite honest, because He is crying, and then He is sort of just like, “Okay everyone, step back.” Like, how did Jesus transition? I am not sure, but it goes on, and Jesus is like, “Lazarus, wake up. Move that stone.” I do not think He did that, but I always picture it like a game show. I am weird, and I do not know if Lazarus was just like waiting, like to be like, “ta-da,” or if Lazarus was lying down and then, “Oh my, oh my God, I am still here,” and he comes out of the tomb. There is no odor, because He was alive, and then Jesus instructs them to remove the grave clothes, and end scene.

Amazing moment, amazing miracle, and then this moment actually is a moment that sparks the plan and the plot to kill Jesus, and so this moment was amazing for all of us, but it actually would go on to begin passion week, where Jesus would be murdered, and so this moment is costly for Jesus, and so the plot to kill Jesus has gone into effect, but then we get to our text of the day, where Jesus finds Himself attending a party that should have been a funeral, attending a party that should have been a funeral. Can you imagine? Can you even imagine having a funeral date on your calendar because someone you love or someone you know has passed away, and I want you to close your eyes right now, because I think if you have been in church for a long time, this text can become casual. “Oh, Jesus, classic Jesus, He raised someone from the dead, and now He is at a party.” It should have been a funeral. It is a whole thing.

Let’s really zoom in to the reality that Jesus is sad. One of his best friends died, that He got the phone call that all of us would dread to receive, and maybe some of us have gotten that phone call where someone we love has died, and we have found out. Maybe we knew it was going to come, but it is still devastating. Maybe we did not know it was going to come, and it is devastating. We get this phone call, and I love that Jesus’ response is to weep, because your response would be just to fall to your knees and grieve and wail and weep. There would be no words for the grief you would feel, and now imagine Jesus comes along, and yes, we go to the funeral, and we are like, we’re there with Jesus in heaven. That is such good news, but imagine Jesus comes along, and He literally in the moment puts breath back into their lungs. Imagine the joy. Imagine the elation.

Imagine how you would actually feel, and imagine you writing on the calendar, “It is not a funeral. It is a party, because my friend was dead, and now they are alive.” Imagine this idea in real time. I need you to, because when Jesus is reclining at this party with Lazarus and Mary and Martha, it should have been a funeral, but it is a party, you guys. Imagine the context of the room. Imagine if you are Mary, how you had just found yourself devastated at the feet of Jesus, and now you start to feel for the perfume in your pocket that was worth a year’s wages, and you did not know what you were saving it for, but you now know that the only response to what Jesus did is complete and utter devotion. She goes from falling at his feet in devastation to falling at his feet in devotion, dumping a year’s worth of wages of perfume on his feet, and wiping it with her hair, becoming undignified before her Lord and her God.

The perfume is significant for two reasons. The first, it says that she therefore anointed his feet. Jesus is called the Messiah and the Christ, and the reason He is called that is because in the Old Testament, the word “Messiah,” actually meant “anointed one,” and back then, they would anoint kings before they were stepping into their duty, and the anointing meant that they were consecrated or set aside for a specific task, to rule the people, and Jesus was prophesied, the Messiah was prophesied in the Old Testament to come, and it was prophesied that this Messiah would come as God’s final plan to reunite His people to Himself by delivering them from sin and establishing dominion, God’s kingdom that would have no end. So, when Mary pours the perfume on Jesus’ feet, what she is saying is she is acknowledging that He is not just some rabbi, but that He is the Messiah, the Christ, the one who would deliver the people from sin and establish God’s kingdom that would not end, not just a resurrection here and now, but a resurrection once and for all, eternity. So, she anoints Him, but then the perfume has another layer of significance.

In the times back then, they would put perfume or spices on the dead, because it would be a last and final moment to dignify this dead body before they would put it in a tomb, so that a stench would not come out of the tomb, and so they would not be remembered for this smell, but they would be remembered for these scents and this love that people adored onto them, and so she says, yes, you are the Messiah, the anointed, but the way that you will deliver the people, defeat sin, and establish the kingdom will probably not be like what the people think, because they wanted Jesus to get into a sword fight with Rome, but what Jesus was going to do is show them that they did not have a Rome problem. They had a sin problem, and what she declares in that moment is that Jesus would need to go on to die, and that was how He would be set aside. He would be set aside for this task of death, and we all know the story.

So, you see her pour this perfume in devotion, but also in declaration of who Jesus was, but also what He would go on to do, and so the only response, the only appropriate response to both realities are suffering and who Jesus is and what He would go on to do is to fall at his feet in both devastation and devotion. So, for us in the room, the middle ground and the response of how we respond and follow Jesus in our messy middles is the practice of lament. So, what Mary does physically, falling at the feet of Jesus in devastation and devotion, lament is how we do that today. Now, lament is not a bypass around one or the other, but lament declares that Jesus as leader, that we go through the cross to the tomb, that suffering must be gone through, but not alone, with Jesus. The definition is lament is a cry of grief or distress directed at God. It engages suffering fully and honestly while trusting in his character and hope.

Elizabeth Lewis Hall, a professor of New Testament at Biola University, says this: “Specifically, lament is a powerful practice for embedding us firmly in the Christian story. A quick search in dictionaries

for the definition of lament reveals that it is to express sorrow, regret, or unhappiness about something. Or it is a formal expression of sorrow or mourning, but Biblical lament is actually much more than this. It is not just a formal expression of sorrow. It also calls out to a specific person, God. Lament situates your story, good or bad, within the greater story of God.” That is what lament does, and there is an entire book in the Bible called Lament, and so if you are struggling to figure out the language or the style or the words for lament, I will read Lamentations 3:19 to 24. It says, “The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this, the faithful love of our Lord never ends. His mercy never ceases. Great is his faithfulness. His mercies begin afresh each morning, and I say to myself, the Lord is my inheritance. Therefore, I will hope in Him,” and so even in the midst of your suffering, Jesus responds appropriately by moving toward it, by seeing it, by feeling it.

I need you to know that your suffering moves Jesus’ heart, and your suffering is deeply personal to Jesus, and then the fifth point is He is not just moved by it, but He enters into it. In the story, we see that Jesus responds to the suffering of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus by raising Lazarus, but what we also need to understand is this moment is in the context of a greater moment, and I think that when Jesus was so deeply moved and deeply distressed within Himself at Mary’s response at his feet, He knew He was going to go raise Lazarus. I think there was a deeper layer of his distress. There was a deeper level of how moved and how disturbed He was by the suffering around Him, because I do not think it was just this one moment. I think it was the idea that there could be, without the cross, a finality to death, that death’s sting, which is a period, which means the only certainty is death, and if you’re an atheist, then you would say that this life is all we have, and once you are gone, you are gone. That idea disturbed Jesus deeply, that suffering would have the final word, that death would have the final say.

I think the distress for Jesus was so much deeper than that moment. I think it was cosmic. Jesus outside of time, your distress, your suffering. I think He felt the weight of human suffering in that moment, and so what you need to understand is that your suffering was Jesus’ why as He went to the cross. Not just Lazarus, not just two-hundred years ago, your suffering now, that Jesus knew He had to go to the cross, because He knew that He would end the sting of death and that your suffering would not end in a funeral, but it would end in a banquet. That is good news, Waterstone, and you might think, “I know this. I know this.” We need to become deeply acquainted with the character of Christ every single day, and so I’m going long. Blessings upon you all. I am so sorry. This is my problem everywhere, okay?

So, Jesus is reclining at the table with Lazarus, Martha. Mary has poured out the perfume. The perfume and the odor are in the house. He is not dead. He is alive, but Jesus knows what He is going to do, and I think for Jesus, this moment is a small vignette of heaven, and this moment would also be Jesus’ why. It says in John 12:11 that the chief priests, yes, they wanted to go kill Jesus, but then it also said that they had a plan to kill Lazarus, which means what Jesus reversed, they were just going to kill him again anyway. Jesus felt the weight of needing to do what He was needing to do, and so this vignette and the perfume and his feet drenched, this was also his why. So, in Hebrews 12:2 we read that for the joy set before Jesus, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, sitting down at the right hand of the throne of God. This moment was the joy set before Jesus, that this party would be his reward when He gets to be reunited with all of us.

So, there is this thing called the Proust effect. Come on, I said it wrong last night. The Proust effect, and it is this idea, the scientific reality that smells and memories are deeply attached. The way we were designed, for some reason, sight, sound, even touch, they have to go through a different processing system before they get to memory, but there is something about smell that skips every processing system but goes directly to the thing in our brain that processes emotion and memory. So, I do not know about you in this room, but I have certain things that I smell, and maybe if you are a parent, it is more like a baby's milk barf. I have no idea. For me, I have these certain smells that bring back memories so intensely, like I am there again. The other day, my friend was eating a tuna sandwich, and I smelled the tuna sandwich, and then I was catapulted back to seventh grade, where I would, face full of braces, did not care what anyone thought, should have cared more, bring in my tuna sandwich, and I could not wait till lunch, you guys. Opened it up, the whole room, not perfume, tuna. You're trying to read *Little Women*, and you got Casey Mexico in the back row eating a tuna sandwich, smiling at you with relish in her teeth. I am taken back to that moment where Oscar Hernandez passes me a note as I'm two bites in, and I read the note, and it says, "You are so good at soccer, would you be my queen, and we could rule the soccer fields together. I'm like, the drama, Oscar, and I remember because I was so immature at the time, which maybe some of you seventh graders are much more mature than I was, do not do this. Instead of going up to Oscar and saying, "Thank you so much. That was such a kind, kind thing to say," but no, I just decided to walk over to the nearest trash can, look Oscar directly in the eye, crumple the note up, and drop it. Yeah, I know. Do not know where he is now. I hope he is married. I hope he got through it.

The next smell that I smell, and I recently bought this vanilla bean lotion from Bath and Body Works, because I had not remembered. I was like, I love that lotion, like when I was younger, and I remember putting it on my arms before going to work, and this memory, like out of nowhere, hits me, and I am back in computer class with Dustin Hoyseth, my first ever crush, the next year after Oscar. I had really matured, and we are sitting there, and every day I would put on the lotion, because I heard that guys maybe like if you smell good, and I just started wearing deodorant for the first time. Middle schoolers, blessings to you, and you are in the awkward phase, and Mrs. Rogers is there asking if we need help, and her breath smells so bad, and we do not need help, Mrs. Rogers. I am trying to flirt my way into my first boyfriend here, and he keeps giving me hints, "I really like this girl, and she's got the coolest last name," and I am like, and he is like, "She is so good at sports." I am like, "Chuck too. It is for sure me," and then I ask him who it is in a note, obviously, and he passes a note back, and he says, "Mackenzie Mexico, your sister. Beautiful," and she did not even like him. He was not even on her list. Devastation, vanilla bean lotion, and so when we think about smell and memories, I think it is important in this text when you see Mary dumping out a year's worth of perfume, not just a little squirt here, a little squirt there for the day, a year's worth, pouring it out, and then it says, "the room was filled with the aroma of the perfume." I wonder if Jesus after this party that should have been a funeral, his grand why to enter the most difficult week of suffering, I wonder if He smelled this perfume on the way. Not just representing Lazarus and Mary's devastation and Mary's devotion, but representing all of not just our suffering, but all of us seeing Him face to face one day, knowing He ended the sting of death, our devotion. I wonder if on the way to the cross, the nailing of the hands, the crown of thorns, the betrayal of Judas, the denial of Peter, I wonder

if that smell stuck with Him and this moment, this party, this vignette of what would be to come in Revelation. I wonder if this kept Him going.

In Revelation, in Psalm 56 and in Revelation, it talks about tears. In Psalm 56, it says this in verse 8, that God keeps track. He keeps track of all my sorrows. “You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” Your suffering is personal to Jesus, so much so that He entered into it, but also so much so that He wants to encounter you in the middle of your suffering, an encounter you might not want, but for Him, He died to be able to even be with you in your suffering now, that He counts it all as joy. Even if you are mad at Him, even if you are frustrated, would you bring all of it to Him? Even if you are devastated, would you fall at his feet? He collects every single tear, and I think the reason He collects every single tear is that one day He is going to get to wipe away every single tear.

In Revelation 21:3 to 5: “This is the end of all suffering, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look, God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new.’” Not a funeral, a banquet is what we are marching towards, but I will dare not to bypass what you are in the middle of right now. I’m sorry.

My last story before we head into worship is just a personal one, because as a pastor, I never want to write a sermon that I do not let first really move me and teach my heart, because that’s what God’s word does. As I was writing this, I was thinking about this past year. For me, I have had one of the hardest years of my life, but not because of the ways I think I thought. I have a good relationship with my dad. He is not a believer, but he has this ideology that if you have negative energy or oppositional, like arguing with your parent, that you just cut them out, because they are bad energy, and so my dad and I got into an argument, which, who doesn’t get into an argument with their dad? I mean, come on. It is your honor. I am your daughter.

We got into an argument a year ago, and if you would be praying with me, praying for him, I just pray that he finds Jesus, and I tried to reconcile and ask for forgiveness, and he will not speak to me. It has been a year, and it has been one of the hardest years of my life to grieve a living parent that I have had a really good relationship with, and I have had a really hard time bringing that to God, because part of me spiritually bypasses myself, and it is like, well, at least I have a Heavenly Father, and God has used so many men in the church, which He has, to be fathers to me. Like there’s so many, take heart, overcome. God has overcome so many of those stories within this story, but then I have a tendency to bypass those, the suffering, and then I do not let God meet me in my suffering and actually be a Heavenly Father, right? But then I have had days where I just sit in it, and I am so sad, and I am so frustrated, and I can’t even just see the good that God is doing in the midst of it. Or even pray that He might change it, and so I have given up even asking God to do a miracle.

So, I found myself within this story, lamenting with God, crying out, but I had a hard time with it until God gave me this image as I was on a walk. There have been so many days where I just want to call my dad and share about my day or ask for encouragement or just like have him laugh at my jokes or the stupid thing I did or the things we call dads for. Even to ask something about my car that I already know,

but I want to make him feel a part of it. I go on a walk, and for the first time I am trying to process with God how mad I am and how sad I am and how frustrated I am. If you have not been honest with God for a while, it can feel awkward at first. You are like, “Am I allowed to be mad? Am I allowed to be sad? Are we allowed to? Are you going to be embarrassed or offended by my tears and my frustrations?” I start to walk, and I start to feel it coming out, and all of a sudden, I see this father-daughter on the path, walking the opposite direction of me, and she is yapping, and she is mad about something. I do not know what happened. Maybe she, I do not know, and she is yapping at her dad, and he has this look on his face, and he is just so happy to be with her, pure contentment that his daughter, no matter what her disposition is, has chosen to bring it to her dad. I felt God press upon my heart, that is we. That is you and I. “I know it is hard. I know it is. I know it sucks, and whether a miracle happens on this side of eternity or not, I am here. I see you. I am moved by it,” and so for you in the room, I do not know where you stand.

I would actually love for you to close your eyes as we head into worship. I just want to ask you two questions as we go in to worship. Mary’s devotion is a response to Jesus’ costly devotion, and today, as we enter into worship, we bring both our grief and our hope to Him, and we actually center our stories within His story. If you are in the room, and you need some courage in this moment to actually fall at Jesus’ feet in devastation and bring Him the things that have been causing you real sorrow and grief, that you have been trying to handle on your own, if that needs to be you in this space, would you lift up your hand? Yeah, I see you. I see hands. I see hands all over the place. I’m sorry. I’m sorry it has been hard. He is going to meet you in that.

If you are in this space, and maybe you have been sitting in your sorrow for a really, really long time, and your testimony actually is just mostly all the bad things, and it feels like the resurrection and the tomb have become just like a faint whisper to you or just almost just like this Easter story that is not really real to you, but you need some hope in this moment that Jesus really did end the sting of death and that He wants to maybe do a miracle on this side of eternity, or you need some hope that even if it doesn’t happen this side of eternity, that there will be a banquet with no more tears, and you need just like a fresh moment with God of hope and joy about his story and yours in it, would you lift up your hand? Yeah, I see you. I see hands. I am going to pray as we go and worship God, and I would encourage you to find yourself, just you and Him.

Jesus, I thank you for what you are doing in the room. Lord, I thank you that we can fall at your feet in both devastation and hope. God, thank you that you died to be with us, and so, Lord, would you help us to come to you with all of it, our hopes, our joys, our trials, our tribulations? But Jesus, more than anything, we say thank you that you are a God that ended the finality and the sting of death, and that we one day will get to recline with you at a banquet. We love you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

44:50 minutes