



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

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Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

First Sunday of Lent: Mary anoints Jesus with oil

Whataboutism is a popular logical fallacy that is used to deflect from the matter at hand. One who engages in whataboutism is trying to categorize criticism of one person or situation as hypocritical unless criticism is applied across all issues. The one asking “what about?” however, is seldom sincerely engaged in the new topic they are bringing up. They are simply trying to deflect from the situation at hand. Great examples of whataboutism in current issues include:

- “What about the problems in our own country?” when discussing foreign aid.
- “What about black on black crime?” when discussing police brutality.
- “What about people who use money to buy alcohol or drugs?” when discussing care for the unhoused.

Most of the time, when people ask “What about?” they are not truly interested in what they are asking “what about” about. They are more interested in deflecting from handling difficult situations and social justice that they would rather ignore.

In this passage, we read of Judas asking “what about” the poor. He sees Mary’s incredible act of love, and makes a show of complaint. The oil Mary uses is the finest quality and it is a large amount. Judas complains that she is “wasting” a year’s wage. Like most who ask “what about,” he is not interested in actually helping the poor. There is nothing that Mary is doing that is stopping him from caring for poor people. Instead, he is expressing his rejection of what is really happening: a deeply intimate act of love and relationship.

In the Gospel of John relationship is everything. When Jesus talks of sin, he is not talking about moral failures. He does not talk about mistakes or errors. For Jesus, sin is being out of relationship. Being out of relationship with God is about living in a state of isolation, darkness, fear-mongering, and whataboutism that cares more about spreading blame than sowing justice.

In this moment Mary is showing what it is to be in relationship with Jesus. As she kneels at his feet, pours the oil on his feet and wipes them with her hair, she is modeling what discipleship looks like. During this incredible act of intimate relationship, all Judas can say is, “what about.”

Next week we will read about Jesus washing his disciples’ feet and we will see that Mary’s act of devotion to Jesus is exactly what Jesus does to his disciples.

In fact, Jesus uses Mary as a model as he teaches his disciples during his farewell. When Mary “wipes” Jesus feet and Jesus “washes” his disciples feet—these are the same Greek words in the original text. Their acts of love, service, and relationship are identical.

Mary expresses intimate relationship. Judas expresses whataboutism and deflects from what it means to abide in Jesus.

Mary expresses extravagant generosity—like Jesus did when he turned gallons of water into wine and produced enough bread to feed 5000 people.

Mary—in the presence of Lazarus who is the living embodiment of resurrection in their midst—understands what no one else does. She is preparing Jesus for death even as they stand in the presence of resurrection.

In this moment we have the entire gospel summarized. Judas chooses selfishness and decides to scoff at the intimacy of Mary. Mary chooses to abide with Jesus in a powerful and intimate way. In this moment we see one path that leads to abiding with Christ and to eternal life. The other path that leads to rejecting that relationship and ultimately to death.

Mary chooses life and life abundant. All the “whatabouts” of Judas cannot take that away from her. So too we must not be distracted by “whatabouts.” Our role as disciples is to pour out our best nard. We are to kneel at Jesus’ feet surrounded by the reality of both death and resurrection in our midst.

We pour out our best on what is needed in this moment. There will always be “what abouts” to keep us from our mission. As long as we abide with Christ, pour out ourselves as a holy and living sacrifice into what matters most in life, we will know life, life abundant, and life eternal.

whataboutism

noun [hwuht-uh-bou-tiz-uhm, wuht-, hwot-, wot-]

a conversational tactic in which a person responds to an argument or attack by changing the subject to focus on someone else’s misconduct, implying that all criticism is invalid because no one is completely blameless.

 Dictionary.com