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"It's the Little Things"

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John 12:1-8; John 6:1-13

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I have a little factoid I want to share with you. Over the 50,000 years or so that mankind has inhabited this earth, who or what has been our greatest threat? (Responses.) Well, as hard as it is to believe, our greatest threat has been the mosquito. Which we've been hearing a lot about recently. It's been calculated that the little mosquito has been responsible for over 50 billion deaths. That's right, 50 billion. It's amazing to think that something so little can have so great a consequence. But it can, and that's what I'm going to talk about today. How the little things we do can have a major impact. And, how by recognizing this, we can become better followers and disciples of Jesus Christ.

But first, let's go again to today's first Scripture lesson. Imagine the extravagance of Mary's action. Pouring her expensive perfume over Jesus' feet, and then wiping them with her hair. Imagine being a guest in that house and witnessing that act. What would you think?... Well, I think it was an incredible act of love, a selfless act of generosity, a heartfelt act of humility, something a true disciple of Jesus Christ would do. For in Mary's eyes, there is no material possession she has that is more important to her than Jesus, nothing she loves more. So she gives him the very best that she has. And there is no act more beautiful than getting on her knees in front of him, and worshipping him. Letting down her hair, giving of herself, serving him. And then consider the aroma of the perfume filling the house, permeating every corner with its fragrant scent. In the same manner God is to fill and permeate every part of our life. Yes, it was an extraordinary moment. I don't know about you, but I feel rather envious of Mary. Because I would like to do something just as extravagant for Jesus. Something to show the extent of my love for him, my willingness to serve him, my desire to put him above all other things in my life. And I imagine many of you would want to do the same.

But for some reason we don't. Why? Well, part of the reason I think is because in today's modern world we have a lot on our plate. Many of us have responsibilities like work, children, parents. Others have worries and stress over health issues – ours or our spouses. And then there's so many earthly pleasures and opportunities and diversions that occupy our time and distract us from God. The bottom line is that we all lead extremely busy lives, and feel we have very little, if anything left to give. And so we often feel we're just not able to love and serve the Lord the way we want. To be the disciples we need to be. And then I think it's easy to get discouraged, or even ashamed, that our faith, our worship, our prayer life, our service, is inadequate. The danger then becomes, we can find ourselves

withdrawing, and not even giving the little we have to give.

But remember last week I told you that in working for the Lord, the task ahead of you is never as great as the power behind you. So let me assure you that the power behind you, Jesus, understands your situation. Because just look at the lives of people back then in Jesus' time for a comparison. The ancient world was a difficult place. And just to stay alive took most of their time and energy. Yet Jesus was able to relate to them and their situations and give them strength and hope by talking about the little things they could do to build their faith. And of the ordinary things of this creation that could remind them of God's love no matter what their circumstances. Because Jesus knew every little bit matters. He talked about little sparrows. And how not even one sparrow is forgotten by God. He compared the kingdom of heaven to that little bit of household yeast that has the power to cause transformation, growth and change. He praised a widow for her little offering to the church of just two ordinary pennies. He said if we had faith even as little as a mustard seed, which is about the size of a pinhead, we could move mountains and accomplish great things. He talked about, and loved, and held little children, and said that only if we become like them can we ever enter the kingdom of heaven. And in today's second scripture lesson, the feeding of the five thousand, it is, in fact, a little child that Jesus turns to.

You know, I think it's often hard to really put ourselves back in that time and place, so I want to read some excerpts of this story from Ken Gire's book, *"Incredible Moments with the Savior."* He writes, "All day long, Jesus has given himself to the crowd, one by one unloading the burdens from their tired backs. It is late in the day now, and the Savior is hungry and bone-weary from the endless press of the crowd. He tries to get a little rest by slipping away up the hillside with his disciples, but the crowd grants him no reprieve. The disciples suggest that Jesus send the people away so they can go and find food. When he sees the flock making its way up the hill, foraging for a few tender mercies, Jesus seizes the moment and asks his disciple Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" The disciple puts a sharp pencil to the problem and is quick to calculate the cost. He concludes that the expenditure is beyond their budget. They don't have enough. He puts his pencil down. "Impossible. Can't be done." And we all have our own list of impossibilities don't we? I don't have the time. I'm too busy. I'm too old. I can't serve the Lord right now because of all the issues in my life. And so on and so forth.

But another disciple Andrew goes to a little more trouble to search for a solution. He doesn't look at

what *can't* be done but at the little that *can* be done. In doing so, he finds a little poor boy with five flat loaves of coarsely ground barley bread and a couple of fish in a wicker basket. "But how far will they go among so many?" Jesus turns to the boy. He doesn't have much. And what he has isn't the best. But what he has is enough. For the willingness of a child and the power of a Savior are all that's needed for this miracle."¹ You see, this story is a testament that our little gifts are just as important as that expensive perfume of Mary's. Yes, this story is a testament that the little things we do as well, can have a major impact.

Let me share with you a more modern day story about how even little efforts matter. Barbara Glanz is a consultant and motivational speaker and she was hired by a large supermarket chain to hold a seminar on customer service. She challenged the employees to find ways to create memories for customers, to make them feel special – even at a grocery store. Well, one nineteen year old young man, Johnny, who was born with Down's Syndrome, was a bagger at the supermarket. At first, he really didn't think there was anything he could do. He was impaired, and he was just a bag-boy. But then he had an idea. He would come up with a "thought for the day," and every night he would have his dad help him print several copies of the thought, and the next day he would put one in the grocery bags of each of the customers that came through his line. Well, about month later, the store manager called Barbara to tell her about the incredible thing that had happened. He said that every day for the past few weeks, the line where Johnny was bagging, was always the longest. Even if there were open lanes and cashiers available, people were willing to wait for Johnny, so they could get his "thought for the day." And even more happen. The floral department in the store picked up on his idea, and whenever a flower had a broken stem, they would cut it and find an elderly lady or little girl, and pin it on them. You see, one little gesture...one huge impact.

To close, I want to quote St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians. "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." So consider this: we are all at different points on the road of discipleship, on our journey to follow Jesus Christ. None of us may be like Mary, but all of us can advance one little step at a time. One little step at a time, with the power of God behind us, encouraging us and coaxing us, until that glorious day, when we are home. Amen.

¹ Ken Gire, *Incredible Moments with the Savior*, pg. 58