

Opening Devotions

High Tech/High Touch

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Pastor Mark Ziemer

Welcome to Grace! Welcome to Grace Lutheran. Welcome to grace – the grace of God just announced to us in the forgiveness of our sins. Welcome to grace – the grace of God that gives you the boldness to come to this event to dare to explore and consider all the tools and means we might use to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

Since this event is on technology we are giving you a taste of it already in this opening devotion. We are using the same slides that we will use tomorrow in worship. In these opening devotions you can get the idea of how technology can be used or at least how we use it here at Grace.

It is fitting that we begin this since we are the amateurs. I confess that I know little about technology, it is not something for which I have a gift, and it does not necessarily interest me. Our facilities here at Grace are not yet two years old. When we built this we decided to build it for the 21st century and thus to include the latest and best technology. As pastor I had no knowledge, gift or natural interest in this technology we were including. I begin this worship today as a sign you don't have to be able, interested, or gifted to do this. All that is necessary is to be willing and to learn together as a church.

The greatest delight I have in Grace using projection is the ministry that it has raised up in our congregation. I have nothing to do with the slides that you are seeing in this devotion. We have a Projection Setup Team who put all of our slides together. I give them the lessons and themes that we will be using a month in advance and they study and search and come up with an image. In that process they absorb and own the message for that day and so much so that they are able to sum it up in one main picture that we use as our theme image for that day. I delight because I have nothing to do with that image and find it usually far better than anything I would have chosen. Many of you have heard and seen how youth are a big part of the technology ministry in churches that use projection. I experienced the power of that reality on one day. As happens in various ministry the person assigned to run the booth for whatever reason had not come. The hymn began and the words did not appear on the screen. The congregation had that panicked look of wondering what to do when suddenly Laura realized she could solve this problem, and without a word Laura instantly popped up, took the problem upon herself, ran to the booth and all was well again. Laura is an 8th grader. How great to have a ministry where an 8th grader feels so valued and empowered and so much a part of the congregation that this 8th grader says don't worry, I can do this, I too have a gift to share for the life and benefit of this congregation and everyone else knows and agrees! Those two realities – the ministry of choosing the theme image and also those involved in the ministry of running the projection – that alone is worth having this technology.

For this devotion I lift up an image for us to keep in mind as we go about this day. It is the image of Mary anointing Jesus' feet which is the gospel lesson for tomorrow. Notice that in the text it suggests that Mary spent 300 denarii for this perfume which would have been the equivalent of about one year's income for a family. In today's

money that would be around \$40,000. \$40,000 is what it cost us here at Grace for the sound and video equipment in this new sanctuary. As Mary spent her \$40,000 on perfume to give glory to Jesus, so that is the intent of the \$40,000 we spent here at Grace on technology – it is to give glory to Jesus.

But notice the response to Mary's act! The response is immediate and strong, and notice the words – "Why this waste! Why was this not sold and the money given to the poor!"

That could well be the response to all that we will be learning today. There will be conflict and resistance to any and all technology that is introduced to the church. That resistance will even sound justified. Technology can take a lot of money. It can seem wasteful. There are better uses and more important needs for that money. I understand that feeling. Technology does not excite me. Yet it is important for us to realize that for many people, technology is as much an act of love for Jesus as the perfume Mary purchased and used in anointing Jesus.

Finally, notice how, where, and why Mary does this anointing. Technology can distance us from people. Mary's act is very important in guiding us to make sure that technology is effective as an act of love for Jesus. First of all the how of Mary's act. It is all about touch. Mary never says a word but her act speaks volumes. It is powerful, personal, and clearly glorifying Jesus because it is all about touch. We need to make sure that our technology does not distance us but in fact does the opposite that it brings us in direct touch with people.

Then notice the where of Mary's touch. Feet smell, especially at that time with the dirty manure covered roads that they walked. Mary touched and perfumed the dirtiest and most stinky part of Jesus. It is important that we use technology to address the deepest, smelliest, most troubling part of human life.

Why did Mary do this? It was an expression of love. It is all about passion. That is why you are here today. It is all about passion. May we use technology, as Mary used that perfume, as a means of expressing our passion for Jesus!

Let us begin! We have much to learn today. As we do so keep in mind this image of Mary anointing Jesus' feet: Technology is not an end in itself; it is not always going to be the best tool. Our goal is to touch! Remember that this mission to which we are called also tells us to take on the smelliest parts of human life and to perfume them. Finally, our motivation and purpose is love. It is expressing passion for Jesus that we too are all about today.