

Ugly Jesus #5
Ugly Worship
John 12:1-8 and Luke 7:36-50
8/7/16

- I have a question for you, like I often do. And, I want you to be honest. But first, do you know what an ugly cry is?
 - The ugly cry is when you are crying so much or so hard that your face is all distorted, your eyes are all squinty, the tears are flowing, the makeup is running, you can't hardly speak and when you do, it's kind of like this.... "AHHHH....," and it's all high pitched.
 - Maybe when you tried to speak spit is coming out of your mouth. I told you, it's an ugly cry. You look ugly doing it, you sound ugly doing it and it comes out when you are experiencing intense emotions.
 - Now, who has ever done the ugly cry before? Be honest!
 - You probably did your ugly cry during an intense time either of intense sadness or maybe intense happiness. The ugly cry is one that flows from the depth of your gut and your heart. The ugly cry is no joke. If someone is crying an ugly cry, it's no joke, something intense is happening within that person.

- Many people might be embarrassed to do an ugly cry, especially in front of anyone else. But, this morning, we are going to look at two stories, two interactions between two women and Jesus. Both of these women went into ugly cry mode because of their love for Jesus.
 - These two women chose to publically pour their love out on Jesus in highly questionable ways. They took their worship to a level of ugly, or at least that's what others would have thought about their worship. The way they expressed their worship could have even been described as scandalous.
 - But Jesus, who as we have been seeing over the last few weeks was often seen as ugly in his ways, his responses and his mission and how he was drawn to those who society considered "ugly" inside, he saw their ugly worship in a different light.

- Today, both of the women in the two different stories are named Mary. Well, only one is actually named as Mary. The other one is assumed to be Mary, possibly Mary Magdalene.
 - Let me give you some background and set their stories up to help us better understand the story when we read it from Scripture. Let's begin with the unnamed woman who many historians believe might well have been Mary Magdalene.

- Jesus is invited to the home of a Pharisee. But, it wasn't because the Pharisee believed in Jesus. Jesus was invited because this Pharisee was going to invite all of his Pharisee friends so that they could try to catch him in a mistake or trick him to say the wrong thing – something that would discredit him.
 - So, when Jesus, their guest arrives, they don't even treat Him with the respect that a common guest would receive. In that time, if a guest entered your house, you had a servant available to wash their feet. They didn't wash Jesus' feet.
 - They would also have oil to anoint a guest's head. They didn't anoint Jesus' head. And, they would greet a guest with a kiss which was the customary greeting when a guest enters your house. They didn't kiss Jesus.
 - Suddenly, a well-known prostitute shows up (possibly Mary Magdalene). Somehow, she was able to get past the servants in order to get into the house because she was certainly not invited.
 - Let's read her story and Jesus' response in **Luke 7:36-50**.

- Then, the book of John tells us of when another Mary anointed and washed Jesus' feet. This Mary was the sister of Lazarus and Martha. They had all become personal friends with Jesus. Jesus has had dinner with them and is sitting there with them and his disciples after dinner teaching and talking.
 - Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus as He talks. Now, as a young girl, she is not afforded the opportunity to speak, but she does something much more powerful without the use of words. She is overwhelmed by her love and gratitude for Jesus. She just has to do something.
 - Let's read her story and Jesus' response. Let's read **John 12:1-8**

- The way Jesus responded in both cases didn't make sense to those who questioned him. His response left them scratching their heads. That's because they didn't really know what true worship was. And, they certainly had not tapped into ugly worship. So, let's look at what worship, ugly worship, is.

- Worship – outward expression of what's happening inside. If nothing or little has really happened on the inside, it is hard for you to really worship.
 - Because the realization is that you came to church today. But, it doesn't mean that you are worshiping just because you are in church today. Joining a church and showing up and maybe even serving in the church is not worship.
 - Sitting yourself in a pew during a church service doesn't make you a worshiper any more than sitting yourself in a garage will make you a car. Have you heard that before? It's so true!

- There are people all over the country, maybe even the world, maybe even in this very sanctuary (though I hope not), who are sitting in a church service and they

have yet to worship. They have not given any outward expression of what is going on in their heart.

- Oh, they may have sang the words, or read the prayers or listened to the sermon, but it wasn't prompted by their heart's desire to seek to praise Jesus or to be changed by Jesus.
- Ugly worship is when you completely abandon what might be socially acceptable to outwardly express your love for Jesus. You completely abandon what others might think because the worship, admiration, praise and love you have for the Lord and what he has done in your life bubbles up and has got to come out in some way, in some physical expression!
 - King David did some ugly worship when he danced with all his might before the Lord and in front of the people in his skivvies when the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Jerusalem.
 - These two women did some ugly worship when they were moved to such tears and sacrifice to show Jesus their love in front of judgmental men.
 - Listen, It's hard for you to completely abandon your self-image, your worries about what is going on in your life or what others might be thinking about you to really worship in a way that others might see as ugly unless you are so moved in your being and your heart by sheer love and gratitude for Jesus.
 - When was the last time you did any ugly worshipping? Have you ever? If not, why not?
- See, I think most people don't or they don't let themselves get to the point of ugly worship. Can I just share an example from what I've observed from adults through the years and, specifically, just a few weeks ago? Three weeks ago, we had our Family Day Picnic and featured the VBS songs that the kids learned and shared some of what they learned through the week.
 - If you were here, you know the songs had hand motions. Of course, I encouraged everyone to do motions. That wasn't the only Sunday I've done that. I'm always encouraging people to move or clap or raise your hands – why? But, it is an outward expression of something that is going on inside.
 - And, that Sunday three weeks ago wasn't the first Sunday that I've encouraged people to do hand motions with kids or teens. Nearly 20 years in ministry and almost all of those 20, I have lead Sundays where the kids or teens were featured, singing the songs they learned and love and almost always they have motions of some sort.
- But, do you know what most adults do? Stand or sit there like a bump. Sometimes, with their hands crossed over their chest as if to say, "I'm not going to do any motions."
 - Maybe adults think that the songs are not spiritual because they are "kid" songs. Not true! If they are worshipping Jesus, they are worthy to be sung anytime, anywhere by anyone!

- Maybe adults think motions are beneath them. Again, not true! Over and over in Scripture we are called to raise our hands, to lift our voice, to shout to the Lord, to dance before the Lord. I don't recall one time in Scripture when we are called to express our praise to the Lord by thinking quietly. Instead, as we think of the goodness of the Lord, we are compelled to speak out, shout out, dance out to the Lord for he is good and his love endures forever!
 - Maybe you're just uncoordinated and you know it. That's ok! There's no judgment here! It's all for God anyways and he created you without coordination.
- Three weeks ago, there was an adult who I noticed trying to do the motions even though he hadn't helped with VBS and so didn't know the motions or even know the songs. Any guesses who it was? Brother Reggie. Now there may have been others, but I noticed Brother Reggie.
- When I reflect upon my years doing kid and youth Sundays, I have seen a pattern that often it is some of the oldest ones in the church, the spiritual fathers and mothers of a congregation who are the most willing to worship differently and to embrace even worshipping with the kids and teens.
 - It might not have always been that way, but as they have grown and matured in the Lord, they have become much more concerned about worshipping the Lord than concerned about what others think about their worship. They aren't afraid to do some ugly worship.
- That's because they have tapped into all that ugly worship is. They have tapped into the beauty of ugly worship. The women in our story tapped into the beauty of ugly worship as well. So, let's take some time to further look at characteristics of ugly worship through the stories of these two women.
- As we look at their stories, we find that...
- Ugly worship is the expression of emotional gratitude for life transformation.
- These women are ugly worshipping because Jesus has changed their lives.
 - Did you noticed what verse 1 said in John 12? It refers to the fact that Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. This event literally took place within days of this dinner. Mary was whose sister? Lazarus's sister.
 - Mary had just seen Jesus raise her brother from the dead! Before that event, Jesus was a family friend and teacher. But, a miraculous touch from Jesus upon her brother showed her completely that Jesus was the Messiah, that Jesus really was the resurrection and the life! And, she was beyond grateful to have her brother back and to personally know Jesus enough for him to allow her to sit at his feet while he talked and taught. She loved Jesus!!!!
 - If the prostitute in the Luke story was Mary Magdalene, Jesus cast seven demons from her. It has also be surmised that Mary Magdalene could have

been the prostitute that was brought before Jesus to be stoned and Jesus wouldn't allow it. Either way, Jesus saved this woman's life both spiritually and physically! Her life was completely different because of Jesus. She loved Jesus!!!

- If worship is an outward expression of how you feel inside, imagine how these ladies felt. They don't care what anyone thinks of how they feel, they've got to express their love for Jesus.

- This is what Jesus was trying to get the Pharisees to see. He shares with them the story of two people who were forgiven of their debts and how the one with the greater debt was more thankful and loved the one who forgave his debt more than the one whose debt was small.
 - How big was the debt of sin that Jesus forgave you of? I know full well how big the debt was for me. And, I didn't even do anything that someone outwardly would be like, "Whoa, she really sinned!" But, I know full well the condition of my heart – how I cursed Jesus, how I rejected him, how my heart was hard and I got to see how wretched a life without him would be.
 - Are you grateful for the debt of sin for you that Jesus took upon himself? Are you eternally grateful for it so that it compels you to express your gratitude and love for him?

- Folks, this is what real worship is. It's not hearing your favorite music performed flawlessly. It's not being reminded of the good 'old days. It's not smoke, lights and video screens.
 - It's the swell of love you feel inside of you for all that God has done for you...and it's POURING all of that inside love, outside on Him! Worship is LOVE EXPRESSED! It is love expressed for all the Lord has done for you!
 - *Psalm 13:6 says "I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me."*
 - I wonder, has God been good to anyone here???

- True worshipers know the goodness of the Lord. They have experienced the goodness of the Lord. Older saints are willing to try the hand motions of children's songs because they have tasted and have seen over their long lives that the Lord is good! They have seen the Lord working in their lives over and over. And, they've just got to praise the Lord, no matter how it might be done and no matter if it is in their preferred style or not.
 - And, I also think that true worshipers will worship even during kids songs because our kids need to see us in full-out, all-abandon, ugly worship. They need to see us get as excited and emotional about worshiping the Lord as they see us get while watching a sporting event! Amen?!
 - Our kids need to see us worship the Lord because we love Jesus for all he has done for us! When they see us worship, they see the value of worship.

- This leads us to the next characteristic of ugly worship. Ugly worship expresses true value and worth.
 - In the story with the Pharisees, the Pharisees valued their reputation and position above all. They couldn't understand why Jesus would allow such a sinner to touch him! It would ruin his reputation. They would have never allowed that for fear of being tainted by her which, would affect their reputation and their position as religious leaders.
 - In the story of Mary, Judas valued money. All he could see was that Mary poured out a jar of perfume that was worth a year's wage! And, it's not that he really wanted to use it for the poor. That was just a way to cover up what he really wanted to do with it!

- But, the women knew what was of true value. Their freedom, their forgiveness from sin, their salvation and their relationship with Jesus – those were of true value. The monetary value of the perfume or the value of their reputation meant nothing compared to the infinite value of their relationship with Jesus and what he did for them.
 - What Jesus values is a relationship with us. What he values is when his children express their deep love for him. Why do you think David was a man after God's own heart? Because David expressed himself fully to God – his love for God, his distress and all of his emotions.

- Jesus values our emotional outpouring to him. See, it would be easy for men to view this scene between these two women and Jesus and kind of chalk it up to women being over emotional. But, Jesus valued their emotional outpouring over what anyone else was doing to worship him.
 - In fact, our culture has made it a negative thing for men to have that kind of ugly display of emotion. But, Jesus values it.
 - See, we were created to be emotional beings. God created that in us. Obviously, there is value in emotions in the sight of God for him to create in us emotions. What better expression of our emotions is there than to express them to God?
 - An emotional response holds great value to God. He doesn't have time for how macho you are. He doesn't have time for how stoic you are. He doesn't care about those things. In fact, those things will keep you from expressing your love to him. They will keep you from going to a level of ugly worship where he wants you to get to!

- Now, Jesus isn't into emotionalism where you are all emotional and it's all a show for yourself or someone else. But, he absolutely wants your heart to be full and overflowing toward him and that often leads to an emotional response. Jesus wants you to be in touch with your emotions, not worship him like an emotionless slug.

- Every true worshiper of God is going to get emotional at some point because the depth of love and gratitude we have for Jesus just moves us. The fact that he saved a wretch like you and me, should move us. The fact that he loves us perfectly even when we are unlovable should move us.
- If we aren't moved by our relationship with Jesus, then we don't truly value it. Nor do we see the great worth of it. If anything – money, reputation, family, other relationships – is more valued in our lives than our relationship with Jesus, then something is very, very wrong.
- This shows a problem in our priorities. And, the next characteristic about worship is that ugly worship aligns with proper priority. It might be tempting to say something like this, "My spiritual gift isn't worship. It's something else, but it's not worship."
 - But, worship isn't a spiritual gift. It is an outpouring of the heart. Nothing can take the place of worship in the life of the believer. Worship, true worship, needs to be our heart's desire.
- That's what Jesus was talking about when he said, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me."
 - Not only did Jesus say that because he knew that he was about to be betrayed and offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.
 - But, he was also saying that good deeds can never take the place of God's presence. Serving, attending church, doing the "right, Christian" things can never take the place of God's presence that can only be found in the worship, in the praise of his people.
- Jesus was explaining the PRIORITY of WORSHIP. Serving and giving to the poor was important. Jesus spoke about this all of the time. But, here he is explaining that even those very important things are not more important than worshiping God.
 - Church, there is nothing more important than your worship to God. And, we have to work to develop a life of worship because for some reason, expressing ourselves can be hard for some folk.
 - So, begin talking to Him daily, singing songs of praise, thanking him, declaring who he is. You might have to push yourself a little if you find this is hard for you.
 - And, listen, I'm saying that as someone who had to push themselves. Music is important to me. I love music. But, I wasn't always a great worshiper. That took me making a decision to not care about what others thought or how I looked or even how I sounded and just sing for an audience of one – Jesus!
 - I've had many people over the years say how much they appreciate my singing. That's nice. But, I am convinced that it's not because I'm the best singer around. It's because I worship and it's freeing and it helps other people enter into the presence of God.

- It is so important to express the love inside in an outward way. Scripture points to the fact that the growth of a believer can be seen in their worship life. Do you have a life of worship? Do you regularly express your love for Jesus in an outward way without regard for what anyone else might think or say?
 - This is why we sing songs to God. Why we raise our hands. Clap. Shout. Whistle. Dance. All of these are biblical ways of expressing our love to God.
 - Now, you don't have to do it like I do it, but you must make worship a priority in your life.

- You must make it a priority, especially if you want to be more like Jesus because ugly worship touches the very heart of God
 - After Mary anointed Jesus with the costly perfume, those present rebuked her sharply, but note Jesus' response. The gospel of Mark records this same story and I'm going to read it from Mark using the NIV because I like how it's worded in the NIV.
 - Mark 14:6, 9 says *"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ... 9 I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

- You know, this is a big Bible with a lot of meaningful stories and events that happened in its pages. I've been preaching and teaching from it for almost 20 years professionally now.
 - And, I haven't yet preached from all of it and I probably won't. There are stories and books of the Bible that I haven't often taught from – like Philemon or Habakkuk.
 - But I've spoken several times on the story of Mary anointing Jesus with oil. If you look in Scripture, it's the only personal story that Jesus specifically demands us to tell throughout the world.

- That's pretty deep, right? The fact that Jesus holds his act of Mary in such high regard that he states this woman will be remembered for all of history, in all the world for what she has done should give us a pretty clear indication of how deeply it touched his heart.
 - There were a lot of people who did a lot of good things for Jesus and because of Jesus and they aren't all listed in the Bible nor did Jesus make this promise.
 - But this woman touched his heart, it was so beautiful to him, and he wanted everyone to know that this expression is what true worship is all about.

- Finally, our ugly worship secures our forgiveness and salvation. That's because ugly worship shows that we put our faith in Jesus and not in anything else. In the story of the nameless woman, who we assume is Mary Magdalene, did you notice what Jesus granted to her because of her ugly worship?

- In that Luke passage, verse 48, it says, “Then Jesus said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven.” The men at the table said among themselves, “Who is this man that he goes around forgiving sins?” And, Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”
 - Her ugly worship, her full-out, heart rending, without reserve act of worship pointed to her faith which touched the heart of Jesus and he extended forgiveness.
- Listen, being the ultimate sacrifice in order to give us forgiveness and salvation was not a cerebral act for Jesus. Going to the cross wasn’t the logical step for him to take. He was moved to do it because of his great love for us. That love was both a choice and an emotion. What he did was an act of the heart. What he did was ugly as he took on our sin upon himself. But, he didn’t care how ugly it was. He was compelled to do it because of his love for us. In the end, he knew it would bring beauty. It would bring salvation.
- So then, true worship is not a cerebral act that is logical and done in three easy steps by doing two songs, a prayer and listening to a sermon.
 - Instead, true worship is an act and a response of our heart because of our love and faith in God through Jesus Christ. It is both emotional and a choice.
 - He doesn’t care when our worship is ugly, with tears streaming down our faces and arms lifted up and we can’t even speak in coherent sentences because we are overwhelmed in our worship and in emotion for him. In fact, he loves it!
 - Ugly worship is beautiful! For that is when we most resemble doing for him what he did for us! We are compelled by our love to enter into worship that might seem ugly to others, but will bring beauty to us and it is beauty to the very heart of God.
- When we worship, truly worship, as an expression of love that pours out of us for Jesus, something happens in us. Worship, true worship, ugly worship transcends time and space and plants us in the very throne room of God.
- So, for the remainder of our time, we’re going to do the most important thing we do. Not feed the needy. Not preach the gospel. Not teach our children. Not even reach out to the poor. Those are all important, but they only really effectively happen when we have first tapped into worship.
 - So, we’re going to pour our praise on Him, on beautiful Jesus. Think on the words, pray the words, express the words in an outward manner.
 - While we are worshipping, the altar is open. If you want to come down here to worship through prayer and thanksgiving, feel free. If you want someone to pray with you, you can come over here.
 - Open yourself up to some ugly worship and see how beautiful it is!