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Good Monday morning, and welcome to Memorial UMC's 10 at 10. Thank you for taking a few minutes of your day to join me for a short time of devotion. I always like to begin my devotion time with a prayer. It's the same one I used last week so the words will become familiar to you. Will you please join me:

Father, you created us and put us on earth for a purpose.

Jesus, you died for us and called us to complete your work.

Holy Spirit, you help us to carry out the work for which we were created and called.

In your presence and name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we begin our reflection.

May all our thoughts and inspirations have their origin in you and be directed to your glory. Amen.

Last week I challenged you to look for God Sightings: Where have you seen or experienced God's love in action? So today I want you to share your God Sightings with the others and me online. Just add your sighting to the comments running on this feed below. If you've never looked for God Sightings it can be difficult at first, but when we slow down and reflect on our past week or even a day, we begin to see patterns of where God is working in our lives and in the lives of those around us. The more you look, the easier the process becomes, and we should give thanks, just as Danny preached to us yesterday. In all things, give thanks.

So I'll start. On Saturday, I came up to the church to prepare my Godly Play classes for the children and found Katie Conant in the parking lot with a pressure washer! She was cleaning all the chairs and tables that belong in the CEC building. What a selfless act to show her love and care for our church facilities. I saw God in the laughter of my daughters spending time together. I saw God in cooking dinner with my love Philip! I saw God giving Payton the strength and endurance to work all day until 4:00 on school assignments, well beyond her regular class time at school!

I want to share with you the lectionary text for today since it is the beginning of Holy Week.

Reading from John 12:1-11:

"Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

"But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, 'That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.' Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

"Jesus replied, 'Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.'

"When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus."

At this point, Jesus has turned toward Jerusalem for the last time and this text reflects a lot of different dynamics going on among the group. But I want us to continue to look at the God Sightings we find in the text.

The first God Sighting I see is that Jesus spent time with his closest friends: Mary, Martha, Lazarus and the Disciples. As we are in this time of social distancing, we are painfully aware of not being able to be close to our family and friends within our church and outside of our church. What a gift Jesus received! I know that have taken for granted the gift of being with others and maybe you are experiencing this too.

Another God Sighting is the extravagant love Mary shows to Jesus by anointing his feet with the oil and her hair. Last summer, when we took my daughter Paige on her graduation cruise, we spent one day at the spa. I bought salt scrubs and special milk bath moisturizers that were very expensive. One bottle cost as much as a 60-minute hot stone massage! So naturally, I've been using this sparingly throughout the year to make it last. There's no doubt that I'm a Martha through and through. Practical, frugal, and task oriented! Oh, how I long to be like Mary and splurge the whole bottle, but my conscious won't let me do it! She didn't use a little oil on Jesus' feet, she didn't even use half the bottle—she used it all! Enough so that Judas got upset and scolded her for it. I can imagine the comfort and love that Jesus received from Mary that day. Can you picture Him smiling down at her? And can you see Mary looking up at Jesus and seeing the love reciprocated in His eyes?

The third God Sighting that I believe can almost be overlooked in this narrative is the greatest one of all! It's Lazarus; he's alive! Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and now they are in his home sharing a meal together. This is what Jesus offers to us—the opportunity to feast at His banquet when we gather for Holy Communion. And ultimately, He offers us resurrection! I have seen churches offering Communion online, and I know it doesn't seem the same. It's not and yet it is. Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in His name, he will be there. Whether online or in person, we are gathered—just as we are right now. That is a gift. I've seen people hosting online bible studies. I've taught and posted Sunday school stories for the kids. There are so many ways we can stay connected to each other as the body of Christ. The Sewing Ministry team is putting together facemask kits to be sewn by anyone who wishes to help. These masks will go to patients all across Davidson County.

For those who are in church leadership, many of you will be familiar or at least have heard of Fresh Expressions. Fresh Expressions is a denominational initiative for us as the Church to discover and implement new ways of being the church that may be outside of our usual worship practices. As I reflect on this season God has gifted us, I think in some ways it is forcing us to be the Church in new and innovative ways. God can use all things for His glory and purposes. Just look at our scripture at how the people flocked to Jesus and Lazarus when word got out that He was in town. More people believed in the Good News.

So maybe you'd like to dust off your sewing machine, or maybe you'd like to write letters and send cards of encouragement to the folks who are serving on the frontlines of this medical epidemic. Maybe you'd like to go do some "window visits" at the retirement centers. Maybe you have thought of something even better and beyond that can show God's great big love for us through Jesus.

We've been given the greatest story ever told. God made us in His image. This is the creative and imaginative God who paints sunsets and places the stars in the sky. This creative God has given you this same ability to express His love in many ways. So this week, Holy Week of 2020, I want you to be a God Sighting.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

