



## Sustained Attention

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*A dinner was held for Jesus in Bethany, the home of Lazarus. Martha served, and Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus. Mary took a pound of costly perfume—its fragrance filling the whole house—and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet with her hair. Judas Iscariot watched disapprovingly and said, "This perfume was worth 300 denarii! I'm sure the poor would be dismayed if they knew good money was being wasted in this way." Of course, Judas didn't really care about the poor. (John 12:1-6, retold)*

To love is to give attention to, to focus in on, to commit energy to, to desire the best for another. To love is to understand the power of selflessness and support. To love is to give and to receive, to reach out and to invite in. To love is to hope. To love is to bless and honor not only someone's esteemed head but also their calloused feet.

And not just once, but continually. Love repeatedly guards the well-being of the other, the self, and the community. Love knows and drinks from an eternal wellspring of hope. Love is not a fleeting affection; it is an undistracted commitment.

Love is sustained attention.

If my soliloquy on love is six weeks too late for Valentine's Day, its challenge is daily:

- The 24-hour news cycle and the media's scattered focus on marketable headlines have the impact of dividing and diminishing our attention span.
- The ploy of Oppression Olympics undermines focused, impactful attention to injustice by pitting all injustices against one another on a scale of least-to-most worthy of attention.
- The anti-homelessness laws implemented across U.S. cities obstruct our attention to the crises of housing and poverty by removing unhoused people from public view.
- The display of outrage, racism, sexism, and grandstanding from the Senate Judiciary Committee last week was an event defined by interruption, disallowing

sustained attention to the well-being (and dysfunction) of the judicial system.

With so many distractions and disruptions every day, the question begs to be asked: Is sustained attention even possible? Do we possess the wisdom, the peace, the love to be unrushed in attending to one another? To be undistracted as we wrap our perfumes, our hair, our blessings around each other's well-being?

Do we know how to serve one meal at a time, like Martha? To listen to one teacher at a time, like Lazarus? To love on one dying man at a time, like Mary?

For the sake of Love, I pray we do.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Rachel Hackenberg is the Managing Editor for The Pilgrim Press and Faith-Forming Publications for the United Church of Christ.

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