How Much?

"I asked God, 'How much do You love me?' 'This much,' He answered, and He stretched out His arms, and He died." He died for the sinner and the shamed and the disgraced and the forgotten and the loner and the stained and the atheist and the prisoner and the sick and the busted and the proud, the rich and the poor, the haughty, the lost and even the found. And the most significant, I think: He died for me.

At my worst, He sought me, and at my most confused, He made sense of me. He didn't overlook all my lies and excuses, and remark condescendingly, "Well, it'll have to be okay because after all, I did promise to die for all the ungodly." He didn't rubber-stamp me and categorize my sin amongst others in my same spiritual ethnicity of addict or liar or embellisher of truth or coward. He saw 'me' and He tailor-made a plan of redemption for me. He didn't snap His fingers, and like a genie in a bottle, grant me three wishes for an escape route. You know - new life, new identity, new vision. In fact, His prescription of healing for me—like all the common side effects today which warn results might not be evident for months—well, mine, took years. And in those stagnate months and tepid years, I found Him there, bedded down with me in my shame, holding me through my sin, patiently waiting me out, willing me toward grace and surrender. He didn't give up on me even when I myself had walked away. He strove amongst my soul's enemies vying for my allegiance and He scooped me out of the scarred dregs of a crack pipe, snatching me from the garbage heap where I'd landed, pulling me out of a miry pit of deceitfulness. I truly am 'the One'. The I He left the 99 for. He looked back; He returned for me, even when I screamed, 'No!' at the top of my lungs. And when I kept failing, returning to my own misery like a dog returning to its own vomit, He sat on the sidelines next to me, waiting as if to finally put me in the game, like a star player benched or set aside or allowed to take a break to catch my breath.

I understand Mary. Mary is the woman who broke her alabaster jar of pure Nard to anoint Jesus. It is said to have been an exquisite and expensive par-fum worth more than a year's wages, and then she dried the tears she wept on His feet with her long hair (Luke 7:36-50). Luke 7:47-48 says, "'Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."' (NKJV) Those in attendance accused her of wasteful extravagance.

Because that woman is me, I call it purposeful worship. I identify with her. If you've never been in such desperate and dire need of God's forgiveness and rescue, than I guess it's possible an encounter with Jesus is *ordinary.* But when the collision with Christ is radical and metamorphic and liberating, it is impossible to stay the same, to be unmoved. He is invasive, permeating even to the marrow of your soul, and the love of Jesus is intrusive and life-altering. It is offensive, and while He is a gentleman, He is also nosy and meddlesome, and His purpose for you and me is presumptive and prying, and He will stop at nothing to get what He wants, which is your soul and mine. The very awareness of God changes your life forever. It did mine, and left me completely astounded, stunned, stymied. Wretched soul am I; how could I be so highly favored that He would adopt me into His family and call me, "Daughter. Child. Beloved."

"I asked God, 'How much do You love me?' 'This much,' He answered, and He stretched out His arms, and He died."

Psalm 18:19, 'He stood me up in a wide open field. I stood there saved, surprised to be loved!' (MSG)