

About 10 years ago, a woman named Marie Kondo published a book. And it made her a celebrity overnight. The book was an immediate worldwide best-seller and has been published in over 30 countries. It spawned four sequel books and two TV series', one of which was nominated for an Emmy. In 2015, she was listed among Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in the world.

So what is this incredibly important book about? Cleaning. That's right. Cleaning. The title of the book is "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up," and it is a self-help book about having a cleaner house. And if you think that's a sad indictment of our current culture, you might be right. However, I have to admit, she does have an interesting perspective.

Because the KonMari method, as she calls it, kind of turns cleaning, organizing, and decluttering your house on its head. When most people clean their house, they're trying to decide what to throw away. But Marie Kondo says you should do the reverse. You should decide what to keep and then throw everything else away.

And how do you decide what to keep? Well, according to the KonMari method, you keep those things that spark joy in you. That phrase "spark joy" is actually a translation from Kondo's original Japanese. More literally, it means, those things that make your heart flutter. Those things that you really love to look at, love to use, love to wear. And everything else, you should just get rid of. They don't bring you joy, so don't keep them in your house.

I bring all this up because it bears an interesting similarity to how Mary Magdalene approaches Jesus in our Gospel lesson today. This passage begins by pointing out that it is six days before the Passover. Six days before the Last Supper. Less than a week before Jesus will be arrested, put on trial, and crucified.

But the disciples don't know that yet. They should. Jesus has mentioned his death and resurrection several times. Peter, James, and John heard Jesus, Moses, and Elijah talking about it on the Mount of Transfiguration. They should be treating every day they have with Jesus as a gift.

But they don't. Their attention is on other things. Most recently, the incredible miracle that Jesus performed. You see, Jesus has just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

And when I say "just", I mean, probably that same day. That morning, Mary and Martha expected to return from the tomb and have a somber funeral dinner. And instead they have returned from the tomb with their dead brother leading the way and the somber funeral dinner has become a party in Jesus' honor.

Which is just fine with everyone. Lazarus and Jesus get a chance to recline at the table and talk about life... and death... and life again. The disciples get to sit around and listen to Jesus chitchat with someone who was recently dead – for, like, the third time – which has got to be a crazy experience. Martha is off doing her Martha thing. Preparing dinner and setting the table and being a good hostess.

And Mary? What is Mary doing when they first get back to the house? Well, we don't know for sure. But I imagine she's thinking. She's thinking about herself and her faith in Jesus. She's thinking about what Jesus just did for her brother. She's thinking about who Jesus is.

You know, when Jesus showed up at Lazarus' tomb, Martha and Mary had very different reactions to his presence. Martha gives a beautiful confession of faith. She testifies of her trust in Jesus, "*Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.*" She testifies of her hope of the resurrection, "*I know that [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.*" She testifies to Jesus' divinity. "*Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*" Martha is an absolute beacon of faith and hope in Christ.

Whereas when Mary is told that Jesus has arrived at Lazarus' tomb, she comes out to meet him and says only one thing, "*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.*" Which does acknowledge that Jesus could have healed him, I suppose. But it also demonstrates her total despair now that Lazarus is dead. Jesus has failed her and she has given up on him.

We often talk about Peter being reinstated after he denied Jesus. Well, the Gospel reading before us this evening is, in many ways, Mary Magdalene being reinstated after she denied Jesus. After she gave up on him.

Because she has had a complete change in attitude. All that bitterness and despair has been transformed into faith and hope. Jesus isn't just someone who can heal the sick. Jesus is someone who can do anything. Jesus is God made flesh.

And the sight of him fills her with joy. It makes her heart flutter to be in his presence. She can't think of anything else in the entire world that she loves like she loves Jesus.

And so she grabs the most expensive thing she owns: A jar of perfume worth 300 denarii. A denarius is often described in scripture as being worth one day's wages. 300 denarii is worth almost a year's worth of wages.

She takes this jar worth so much. Worth basically her life-savings. And she pours it on his feet. Because it is now worthless in comparison to what Jesus can give her. She looked at her life and found only one thing that sparked joy for her. So she threw out everything else and kept just that one thing: Jesus.

That's what Paul is talking about in our Epistle lesson: God loves a cheerful giver. Cheerful giving is about finding joy in what Christ has given you. Finding so much joy that everything else just pales in comparison.

Which might partially explain why Judas did what he did. There's a lot we could unpack with Judas and his motives, but this passage here really highlights how greed has overwhelmed him. Anybody who can use an argument for generosity as a way to further their own greed has really lost track of their moral compass.

But that's exactly what Judas does. There's only one thing in Judas' life that sparks joy for him. Only one thing that makes his heart flutter. Only one thing he truly loves. And it's not Jesus. It's money.

And even after watching Lazarus rise from the dead just a few hours before, he can't comprehend how anyone could love Jesus more than money. It's totally beyond him. And so it really shouldn't surprise us when he betrays Jesus. The chief priests offer him 30 pieces of silver and he's willing to get rid of everything in his life for that spark of joy. Everything... including Jesus.

But that's what greed does to us. It takes our eyes off Jesus. It blinds us so completely that even when we see him do something divine, all we can think about is our own gain. Finding joy in the things of this world. Getting, instead of giving.

When Jesus tells his disciples, "*The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me,*" he's not telling them, "Don't help the poor." Far from it. Generosity is part of the Christian life. The world will know we are Christians by our love.

No, what he is telling them is, "Don't take your eyes off me." Generosity without Christ is worthless. Sure, it will help your neighbor's body. But it won't help your soul or his. You'd be better off pouring that money on Jesus' feet than being generous for the sake of being generous.

Because at least pouring it on his feet shows that you know who's in charge. Who has the authority over life and death. Who is your only hope for resurrection from the dead.

That's what we remember Mary Magdalene for. Not for wasting \$50,000 in perfume that could have gone to the poor. But for realizing that \$50,000 is nothing in comparison to eternity with Christ. For deciding that \$50,000, \$50 million, \$50 billion would never bring her the joy that being next to Jesus would bring her.

Lent is often used as a time of fasting. A time of giving things up. But I think it should also be a time of giving things away. Not simply because we have too much clutter in our lives, like Marie Condo says. Although that's certainly true. Not simply because we have so many people in our world who need our generosity. Although that also is very, very true.

No, most of all, Lent is a time of giving things away because, having seen what our Lord did on the cross, well... we just don't need them anymore. Nothing is quite as good as what we are given on Good Friday. Nothing is quite as joyful as the spark of joy we receive from our Lord's love for us. Amen.