

## **Fifth Sunday in Lent April 3 2022**

### **John 12:1-8**

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Scents are powerful, aren't they? I can remember the scent my mother wore when she got dressed up for a special date. A scent I knew meant mom and dad were going to a party- flowery and full. Have you had a moment where a scent took you back to some other time or place? It's what is sometimes called body/sense memory, things locked away in our memory that are opened by a sight, sound, taste, smell. Of hot asphalt right after a summer rain. Of that special meal your grandma used to make.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

I remember coming into First Lutheran very early on Easter mornings to set up the youth breakfast and approaching the sanctuary through the narthex. I would be a good 10-15 feet from the open doors of the sanctuary when the fragrance of the lilies would hit me like a wall. Flowery, cloying, surrounding me with their fragrance. And, unfortunately, lock my sinuses right up! But that was the smell of Easter!

The house was filled with the fragrance of the opened jar of ointment of nard, a pound, poured out on Jesus' feet. Wiped from them by Mary's hair. What did that perfume smell like? I was asked that question by a colleague and found no good answer except earthy, woody, spicy, musty. Some of which makes sense as it was made from a root grown in the mountains of Nepal. But, if nard was used

regularly to anoint bodies for burial, I also wonder if it didn't smell like death to those present? If their body sense memory didn't go to that place because that's what that scent was associated with- especially since those present had recent experience with such.

We are in the house of Lazarus- recently raised from the dead by Jesus (see chapter 11 of John). Whose body his sister Mary (along with their sibling Martha) would have anointed for burial, maybe with ointment from this same jar.

Jesus, Lazarus, the disciples, Mary and Martha have just shared a meal together and as the eating has ended, Mary approaches the feet of Jesus. Remember this story when we gather again on Maundy Thursday- around another shared table of Jesus and his disciples- when he will approach them and their feet. Mary takes a pound (an extravagant amount- one might even say prodigal!) of ointment of nard (something worth almost a year's wages- an extravagant cost – one might even say prodigal) and anoints Jesus' feet. Then, she uses her hair to wipe the oil from them. The language used is the exact same as used for the action of Jesus wiping the feet of the disciples during Holy Week and these two incidents are the only time that word is used. John deliberately connects these two moments.

Why does Mary anoint Jesus' feet? If it was to declare him king, or God's chosen it would have been his head she anointed. That's how you did that. Not his feet. Those dirty, unclean, stinky means of locomotion that only the humblest of servants touched. Feet, like those of his disciples that Jesus will kneel and wash on that Maundy Thursday at the final meal with them. Like the humblest of servants. The humblest of acts.

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What is going on here? In this intimate setting around a shared meal, with those whom he loved around him, we see in Mary's action an example of the reciprocal love Jesus will call his disciples to show to everyone at the Last Supper (come back on Maundy Thursday with this story ringing in your ears). A love that doesn't count the cost (as Judas does). That is extravagant- prodigal even- in loving God because that is how God loves us. Jesus in the Gospel of John says he has come "that they may have life and have it abundantly". The prologue of John says that in the Word made Flesh that is Jesus we have received grace upon grace. Our cup overflows with God's prodigal love and mercy. And we respond in kind to God.

Sometimes, there is value in giving God the best. After all, the Gospel of John reminds us that where our treasure is – there our heart will be also. If we send our best to God, give off the top of our resources, ourselves, our talents, our time, our hearts will follow.

Mike Rinehart asks us in one of our chapters from his book to assess how we spend our time. One of the things we value most in our society. Because that will tell you where your heart is. What is really important to you. Are we extravagant with our resources in our love of God? Or do we react like Judas, 'That's too much!'

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An extravagant, prodigal, visible, costly, outpouring of love for the Lord who means everything to Mary, who called her brother back into life. Mary, who sat at the very feet she now anoints to listen to Jesus- much to the annoyance of her sister, Martha. Who shows in her action the kind of love Jesus will, in another few weeks, call his followers to have for one another so that the whole world might

know that they are his disciples. A love that comes from the abundance of grace, love, and mercy we have experienced in our lives with God. A love that believes always that there will be enough and more than enough for all.

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It is the smell of God's extravagant love for the world bearing fruit. Blossoming in this woman who has received the outpouring of God's Word in Jesus, experienced firsthand the power he has to bring the dead to life, and who in anointing Jesus now knows that not even death can defeat the will of God that he embodies.

I wonder if from that day forward Mary carried that scent with her- like how woodsmoke lingers on your clothes, or when you walk into a room and know someone has been there by the fragrance that lingers. That just by entering a place, by living out who she is as a follower of Jesus, she fills where she is with the fragrance of God's abundant love for the world.

Mary doesn't know what the next few weeks will bring, but she is confident that in Jesus God is doing a new thing, something better than what came before. A new thing that is worth prodigal gifts on our part. A new thing that will mean life from death.

Oh, that we would be like Mary and not like Judas. That we would trust in the abundance of God enough to show extravagant love to His Son. That we would trust the abundance of God enough to show this extravagant love to one another. To break open the jar of our lives and pour ourselves out, extravagantly.

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What would it be like for us to carry the smell of God's extravagant love into the world? That the scent of that love would go with us from this place into the rest of our lives, a wonderful fragrance of new life and hope that wafts into the workplaces, schools, and homes we enter. That would linger there long after we leave.

What would it be like for us as a congregation to fill this city of Ely with the fragrance of that perfume of God's extravagant love in the world? Such that when people entered this town they would walk into a wall of fragrance and know, something wonderful is happening here!

Oh Mary, inspire us with your boldness and faithfulness. O Holy Spirit come to us through your Word and fill us with this perfume of God's extravagant love and grace. Oh Lord Jesus, do in us a new thing, that we might go into the world you so love, enough to pour out your very life on the cross, that we might be your hands and feet bringing transforming grace upon grace to all we meet. Filling the house of this world with the fragrance of your love.

Let it be so. Amen.