

“The Perfume of Love”

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John 12: 1-8

Have you ever heard the saying, “When you’re dying, you will not be saying to someone that you wish you had spent more time at the office?” I think it is true. There are things that matter in this world more than work, earning money, getting a job done, being thought of as a hard worker, etc. Things like quality relationships with family and friends, time to just be together, having fun, being creative, time alone, saying the things you need to say to people while they are here now.

When I was a chaplain in a trauma hospital, I learned the art of being purposeful in each visit. Because you never knew if you would have another chance to talk with that person again. So if they brought up something you thought needed to be talked through, you did it- otherwise the opportunity would be lost. It’s actually a pretty good habit to be in- saying what you need to say and to do it here and now.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus did that in this passage today. She used symbol and actions and real expensive perfume to anoint Jesus before he is killed. To tell him what he means to her and express her faith at the same time. Listen for the Word of God in this passage from John 12: 1-8.

Mary anoints Jesus' feet

12 Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table. ³ Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound,^[a] of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume. ⁴ Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained, ⁵ "This perfume was worth a year's wages!"^[b] Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?" (⁶ He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.)

⁷ Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me." "This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God"

God does shocking things throughout the Bible. Usually men are anointed by men. But here Jesus is anointed by a woman. And Jesus doesn't let the cultural taboos about her hair being down or the sensual way that she anoints his feet with this extraordinarily expensive perfume distract him from his appreciation and love of these friends, or the complaints that Judas makes over the money not being spent in a worthy way- as if he really cared about the poor! Jesus stays steady-always pointing to God and God's realm of love for all- and models it in this setting with Mary and the others at the dinner. He lets her do this! He is not embarrassed by it or does not try to discourage her from this show of love for him.

I imagine that we all would like to have that kind of attention before we die. Not wait till the memorial or funeral service when it is only said to those who knew you, but straight to your face! Funerals are for the living- not the dead. But a party to celebrate your life, to cherish you when you are old- before you die- or better yet; moments like this one with people that you really love- shared openly and celebrated -are what life should be about.

As we approach Holy Week next week, instead of paying attention to the gruesome violence that was done to Jesus, why not look at the surprising ways God comes into our lives in the here and now? Perhaps it is calling an old friend that you haven't talked to for a while. Perhaps it is noticing someone who needs help and helping them. Or receiving care from someone or words that help you to understand your life-spoken in the here and now because the time was right. Make the most of the days you have. Smell the perfume. Feel the massage. Look at the beautiful love in people's eyes that you see. Life is short. And God means for us to enjoy it-not feel guilty or burdened. Smell the perfume. Amen.