

“Anointed with Love” – Matthew 26:6-13

I have a homework assignment for you. I want you to read Mark 14:3-9 and also John 12:1-8. Reading those passages will broaden your perspective of what we're going to look at this morning. I wish we had time to look at all those passages in detail this morning, but I see none of you has packed a lunch.

Last week, we looked at the first five verses of Matthew 26. My prayer is that it has in some small way helped you prepare for our celebration of Resurrection Sunday. Jesus went to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He took the hit for us. He laid down His life for His sheep and if you can hear His voice, you belong to His flock.

Jesus was a willing sacrifice. I hope I communicated that last week. Nobody took His life from Him; He laid it down of His own will. (John 10:18) He was tortured and killed by evil, sinful men. Satan did in fact bruise His heel but it was God's plan all along. Jesus went to the cross because He wanted to rescue you and on the third day, He rose from the dead, defeating the devil once and for all.

He purchased our salvation, and all we have to do to accept His gift of grace is simply believe. Believe that you are a sinner. Believe that the just wage of your sin is eternal death. Believe that God loves you anyway. Believe Jesus died for you. Believe that He rose from the grave so you can have a living relationship with Him. Consider Him to be the Lord of your life.

"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:29)

Have you trusted Jesus for your salvation? Is He your Lord? Do you believe God raised Him from the dead? If you do, you belong to Him and His inheritance belongs to you. You have an eternity to look forward to, an eternity of glorifying Jesus and enjoying Him forever, in a place where ...

... God will wipe away every tear from your eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

Jesus loves us so much! Jesus loves you so much! How do we respond to such love? If you truly understand what Jesus has done for you, then you will want desperately to live your life in a manner that pleases Him. It's why Paul exhorts us:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)

And so, after Matthew tells us about Jesus predicting His crucifixion at Passover in verses 1-5, he continues his account with a story about Mary. There are a bunch of Marys in the Bible. Now, this is not Mary, the mother of Jesus and this is not Mary Magdalene. This is Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Lazarus, if you recall, is the friend of Jesus whom He raised from the dead after he had been in the tomb for four days. She is the sister of Martha. Martha certainly had a servant's heart. She also demonstrated faith in our Lord but at one point, Martha was distracted and became pretty exasperated with her sister. Remember the story?

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had

a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Mary was devoted to Jesus and that devotion led her to sit at Jesus' feet. She longed to hear His words and Jesus commended her. That good part would not be taken away from her. This is the Mary who is the subject and heroine of this story.

I used to think this story was a bit unusual. I wondered why it was so important to include in the gospels. I don't think it is unusual any more. In fact, I think it is critically important if we are to understand our reasonable response to Jesus' love and sacrifice.

It is a story that shows up in three of the gospels. It is included in Matthew, Mark and John and that's why I gave you your homework assignment. Luke has a similar story, but if you study it carefully, you will clearly see that Luke is recounting a different occasion.

Skeptics have tried to point out inconsistencies between John's account, and the accounts found in Matthew and Mark. I hope to show you this morning that there are no inconsistencies. The stories are told from a slightly different perspective but they actually harmonize very well. Let's take a look at Matthew's account now:

And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor." But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:6-13)

As we study the scriptures, we know that Jesus and His disciples lodged in the town of Bethany during the first part of what we call Passion Week. He came into Jerusalem during the day. He did his work, cleansing the Temple, teaching, and pronouncing judgment on the religious rulers. And then He left during the late afternoon to travel the couple miles back to Bethany to spend the night.

When we read about this event in Matthew and Mark, we might assume that it occurred on Tuesday evening, but we would be wrong. Tuesday was when Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse of chapters 24 and 25 and as we saw last week, it was "after Jesus had finished these sayings" that he predicted His crucifixion at Passover.

But if you look closely at how the story begins, neither Matthew or Mark indicate exactly when it occurred. Matthew says, "And when Jesus was in Bethany". Mark says, "And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper". Neither one of them gives a definite time reference. But if we look at John:

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. (John 12:1)

John pinpoints the time at six days before Passover. This is not a contradiction. Matthew and Mark are just turning back the clock. They locate the story here because it fits thematically. I know we westerners like our stories to be sequential, but they don't have to be. It is located here because thematically, it communicates the appropriate response to Jesus' unfathomable love. He would willingly be sacrificed at Passover. The appropriate response is worship.

Now, you might also notice, that Matthew doesn't even mention Mary's name. Neither does Mark. I'm sure glad John does, but why would Matthew and Mark leave her name out?

One thing you need to understand: Women were not held in high esteem in First Century Palestine. In fact, along with children, they were considered possessions of their husbands. Jesus greatly raised the status of women. He actually spoke to women – no other self-respecting Rabbi would do that. And contrary to what many folks will tell you today, in the ensuing 2,000 years, wherever Christianity has taken root, the plight of women has been improved.

Women, don't let anyone try to use the Bible to say you are second-class citizens. You are just as precious in God's sight as any man. Paul says:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Matthew and Mark, being Jewish boys influenced by the prevailing culture, might not have thought it important to identify the woman. But Mark did.

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. (John 12:3)

Now, for those of us who reside in our Western culture, this seems like an unusual act. From Matthew and Mark, we learn that Mary poured the spikenard on Jesus' head. From John, we learn that she also anointed His feet. Jesus tells us she anointed His body for burial. This was an act of extreme devotion and love. This was an act of worship and it cost her dearly.

Certainly, we see it as an act of humility, especially the part about her wiping His feet with her hair. But think for a moment about the cost of the oil itself. It certainly made an impression on the disciples:

But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor." (Matthew 26:8-9)

From John's account, we learn just how valuable the oil was:

"Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (John 12:5)

A denarius constituted the daily wage for a common laborer. So, if you take out Sabbaths and you take out feast and festival days, 300 denarii represent over a year's wages. This was likely Mary's most prized possession. By far! From the disciples' perspective, it was wasted on Jesus.

Really?

John tells us that it was Judas Iscariot who first voiced the objection.

This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. (John 12:6)

Well, that's pretty blatant! Judas was in it for himself. I don't think it is a coincidence that it was just after this event that Judas went to the Chief Priests to find out how much he could get to betray His Lord. But that is the way of the world. It is the way of the flesh. And yes, I'm sad to say, it is the way of my flesh ... and of yours. What's in it for me?

The "what's in it for me" attitude is a major roadblock to our walk with Christ. It gets in our way. It keeps us from worshipping God as we should.

Back when I worked for the Marysville School District, I had a coworker who was shocked to learn that we tithed to our church. He was the one who brought it up, saying "I just can't believe some Christians actually give 10% of what they make to their church."

I said "Well, that's what we do. It's not because we have to, it's because we want to."

He looked at me and said "What a waste! Think of what you could do with all that money." He was looking at it from the perspective of "What's in it for me?" and with that perspective, tithing makes no sense at all.

He didn't understand. It's not a waste. It is an act of worship.

When I consider what Jesus has done for me, He is infinitely worthy. He is worthy of far more than I could ever give. Think of what His love compelled Him to do for us!

We love Him because He first loved us! (1 John 4:19)

After Judas raised the objection, it seems that the rest of the disciples piled on. "Why this waste?" "We could have taken care of the poor." But worship is never wasted and Jesus rebuked them.

But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:10-13)

This had me perplexed for many years. I didn't understand. Aren't we supposed to take care of the poor? Well, yes. We are to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, to take in strangers, to clothe the naked, to comfort the sick, to visit those in prison. And Jesus says:

'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:40)

So why was dumping this oil on Jesus more important than giving to the poor? Why would this story be told wherever the gospel is preached? Why would it be a memorial to her?

Because Mary demonstrates the fact that Jesus is worthy of our worship.

Interestingly enough, when Kris and I were on vacation, we heard Pastor Nathan Grosse preach on this very passage. He pointed out something I'd never thought of before. After Jesus was crucified, a group of women made their way to the tomb early on Sunday morning. Do you remember what they were going to do?

*Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.
(Mark 16:1)*

They wanted to anoint His body for burial. It was to be an act of respect, of love, of worship. But they didn't get the chance. His body wasn't there! But this Mary, the sister of Lazarus ... according to Jesus: *in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial.*

Don't miss out on any opportunity to worship Jesus. Don't miss out on any opportunity to gather with your brothers and sisters in Christ to exalt His name. Don't miss out on the opportunity to serve Him by sharing the good news of the gospel with the lost. Don't miss out on the opportunity to extend His grace to others. It might be your last chance to do so in this life. You might die tonight.

Besides, worship is never wasted.

Before I let you go, I need to make sure you understand what worship is. It is not just singing spiritual songs on Sunday morning. I think the modern church, especially the Western evangelical church has created an unfortunate misunderstanding. In a lot of churches you have a "worship leader". You might have a "worship team". And all they do is lead singing. There is nothing wrong with singing praises to the Lord. It is something we should do and yes, it is worship. But when it comes to listening to the word of God being preached, nobody thinks of that as an act of worship any more.

But as Christians, everything we do should be an act of worship.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

Giving your time, your money, your resources to the work of the gospel is an act of worship. Inviting your neighbor to our Easter breakfast is an act of worship. (Hint, hint!) Laboring faithfully and diligently for your earthly employer is an act of worship because when you are known as a Christian, your work can exalt Jesus. So you work ...

... not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, (Ephesians 6:6-7)

Brushing your teeth should be an act of worship. I'm serious! "Thank you, Jesus, that I have these teeth." (Even if they don't happen to be teeth you were born with.)

I praise God and worship Him for the gift of these artificial ears that I wear. I'd be helpless without them. God made it possible for me to continue hearing ... usually.

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
(James 1:17)*

Praise the Lord for those good and perfect gifts! Your worship will not be wasted.

Jesus loves you enough to lay down His life for you. When you are mindful of Him in all that you do, when you worship Him, you, just like Mary, anoint Him with your love.