

Mark 14:3-9
A Beautiful Thing!
WRCoB 3.29.20

Science has known for a long time
That smell triggers the memory

I understand that the sense of smell
Passes through the region of the brain
That stores memory and emotion.

This close association in the brain
Causes smell to excite the memory.

Certain smells send me back to another time and place.

A few come to mind.

The smell of burning leaves in the fall
Takes me to 774 Mill St, Elgin, IL.
And my elementary school years
When we raked leaves into the street to burn.

The smell of a boxwood bush
Immediately takes me to my grandparents' yard
On their farm in Bedford Co., Virginia.

I can see it now . . .

The big oak tree in the middle of the yard
And grandpa and grandma's metal yard chairs
Beneath its sprawling shade.

The smell of Noxzema, so vividly reminds me of my Aunt Sis
Who used it daily for years.

Corn silage and cow manure, you might find it odd
Smells I dearly love
Take me back to my dairy farming days.

What are the smells that trigger special memories for you?
How I wish I could hear you share them.

Certain smells associated with certain memories
Have a way of taking you
To those poignant moments in time.

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My guess is that every time one of the disciples
Smelled the expensive perfume nard

It took them back to a night long ago
To the home of Simon the Leper
Of Jesus, and a woman, and an anointing.

Mark mentions the expensive alabaster jar of ointment
He names of the perfume, nard.
They were well remembered.

Strange, from Mark's Gospel, nobody remembers her name.

Mark 14:9 NRSV Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.

Her gracious act, yes! Just not her name.

Nard, aka, spikenard, nardin, or muskroot

Is a class of aromatic amber-colored oils.

Derived from a flowering plant of the Valerian family.

Farmers grew Nard in the Himalayan Mountains

Of Nepal, China and India.

Merchants exported it to Palestine and the rest of the world.

Due to the difficulty in extracting the resin

And imported from so far away

Nard was an extremely expensive perfume.

Normally, a very small amount went a long way.

Not so in our story today.

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If you read the other gospel accounts

Referring to this event

You will encounter some inconsistencies.

And whether the differences
Point to differing accounts of the same story

Or the differing accounts point to different events
It is anybody's guess.

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Matthew and Mark do not mention the woman's name.

John claims it was Mary, the sister to Martha and Lazarus.

Mark says the woman anointed the head of Jesus.

John claims Mary anointed his feet
And wiped his feet with her hair.

Mark and Matthew wrote that "some of the disciples"
Complained about the excessiveness of the act.

Whereas, John claims it was Judas Iscariot.

Luke shares a story quite similar
But places it at earlier on.

Luke's account has a prostitute, perhaps Mary Magdalene
Doing the anointing.

But here we are in the Gospel of Mark
And we will hear the story from his point of view.

What we know from Mark

Is that Jesus and his disciples are in Bethany

The other side of Mt Olivet from Jerusalem.

It is Wednesday evening of Holy Week.

They are in the home of Simon the Leper.

A woman comes in with an alabaster jar filled with nard.

Alabaster is calcite, a mineral.

It is a rock-like material.

Mark says she breaks the jar that contains the perfume.

She anoints Jesus' head with it

Not with a finger dipped and placed on the forehead.

She pours it over his head.

She uses it all. Nothing remains.

Mark comments that "some of the disciples"

Were angry and said as much.

Mark 14 (NRSV) ⁴ Why was this ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor."

One Denarii is one day's wage.

300 Denarii gets close to a year's wage.

If the average income in the USA is \$63,000/year
Using today's standards

She poured out maybe \$50,000 worth of perfume
Onto the head of Jesus.

\$50,000 dollars!

If we, Brethren, would have been there
We would have grumbled too!

I mean really . . . what a waste . . . a whole jar?!

They scolded her.

Mark 14:6-8 (NIV) “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

You see, even right up to Wednesday of Holy Week
Two days before his crucifixion

Even after Jesus predicted his own suffering and death
Not once but three times in Mark's gospel.

Even after Jesus got on the wrong side
Of the religious leaders
Who now were conniving to kill him

The disciples could not wrapped their heads around the idea
That Jesus was not going to leave Jerusalem alive.

It was only this woman . . .

Who envisioned the unfolding drama of the week
Who knew, without any doubt
Things were not going to end well for Jesus.

Impulsively and spontaneously
She expressed her undying devotion for Jesus
By anointing his head
Maybe John was right too
AND his feet
In this sacrificial act.

Her love for Jesus overwhelmed her!

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Little did she know, until later . . .

She, unknowingly, performed a priestly duty.

In New Testament times

Only Levitical priests performed the anointing service.

They anointed for several reasons:

- To consecrate someone as king
- For medicinal purposes
- To prepare a body for burial.

This woman became a priest to Jesus!

She anointed and crowned him the Messiah

The Anointed One!

And at the same time

Prepared his body for death and burial.

She ministered to him when no one else thought to.

“She has done a beautiful thing.”

A beautiful thing indeed!

In looking ahead, If Mary Magdalene anointed Jesus

Then she not only prepared his body for burial

She also, on Easter morning, went to finish the job.

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If someone wanted to express their love
For another person they cared for deeply
In one intentional act
Short of dying for them

What could they do?

That's what she did.

In an emotionally charged, impulsive act
She expressed her love of Jesus
In as lavish and extravagant way
As she knew how.

She must have spent every penny she had
On that alabaster jar of nard
To convey the love she had for him.

In that regard, she is like the widow
Who placed her two mites into the temple's treasury.

In Mark 12, Mark writes that Jesus watched people
Putting their money into the offering box
At the treasury of the temple.

He saw many rich people putting in large amounts of money.

A widow comes along.

She places two small coins into the offering box.

Jesus says of her

Mark 12:43 Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

Whoever this woman was

Whether Mary, sister to Martha

Or a prostitute

Or Mary Magdalene

\$50,000 dollars' worth of oil would have broken her!

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Yes, I agree, the woman's behavior was extravagant.

Her actions were excessive and wasteful.

Yes, they could have used the money for charity.

No denying!

Yet, if you ask her if, she regrets doing it

She would tell you, she'd do it over and over again!

Surely, if she was asked to die in his place
She would have done so
She loved him so.

But it wasn't her life they wanted . . . it was his.

She did what she could.
And today we remember.

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The scent of burning leaves
The smell of boxwood
Cow manure and corn silage
Conjures up memories of old.

These smells helps to keep them alive.

Memories of my mom and dad when they were younger.
Memories of my childhood with my three sisters.

Grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins
Family and friends, many who have passed on.
An age of innocence no longer.

These smells bring me back those moments.

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Those who gathered that night in Bethany
Whenever they smell the perfume nard
It takes them to a place in their memories

Of Jesus, a woman, an anointing.

A bitter/sweet memory

For just two days after the woman anointed Jesus

The Roman soldiers took him to a hill called Calvary
And nailed him to a cross.

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If God wanted to express his love to us
In one act of love.

What would God do?

He would give his one and only begotten Son
As an ultimate love offering.

For isn't dying on behalf of someone
The ultimate expression of love?

And indeed, Christ died for us.

**1 John 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished
on us**

Jesus did what he could.

And HE has done a beautiful thing.

