

Mark 14:3-9
A Beautiful Thing!
WRCoB 3.24.24

Science has known for a long time
That smell triggers memory

That the sense of smell passes through the brain
Where the brain stores memory and emotion.

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.

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

What are the smells that trigger special memories for you?

SHARE

Certain smells associated with certain memories
Have a way of taking you
To those special memories.

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I'm sure every time 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, a woman, and an anointing.

Maybe, that's why the disciples
Remember the name of the perfume
But not the name of the woman.

For Mark records it was an expensive
Alabaster jar of ointment, its name, nard.

They also remembered, of course, the anointing.

Mark 14:9 CEB I tell you the truth that, wherever in the whole world the good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her.

Her gracious act, yes, they remember! 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.

It was a difficult process to extract the resin
And since it was imported from far-off lands
Nard was an extremely expensive perfume.

Normally, a very small amount went a long way.

Well, not so much in this case.

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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
Is anybody's guess.

Matthew and Mark don't mention the woman's name.

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

Mark says a 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 earlier.

Luke’s account has a prostitute
Some suggest Mary Magdalene
Doing the anointing.

And because of the extreme expense of the perfume
Which I don’t think Mary, the sister to Martha
Could have afforded it

I, myself, would lean towards a woman of wealth.

But we are here 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.

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

Now, alabaster is calcite, a mineral, a rock-like material.

She breaks open the jar that contains the perfume.

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.

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."

For a clearer understanding

One Denarii is one day's wage.

300 Denarii is getting close to a year's wage.

If the median household income in the USA is \$63,000/year
Then, 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 witnessed this
We would have been appalled at such waste

Our mouths would have dropped open
At such foolishness

\$50,000 dollars! Completely uncalled for!

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 here, 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 wrap their heads around the fact
That Jesus wasn't going to leave Jerusalem alive.

It was only this woman
Who sensed the sensed the approaching doom.

Impulsively and spontaneously
She expressed her undying love and sorrow to Jesus
By anointing his head, or feet, or both.

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Little did she know she performed a priestly duty for Jesus.

For it was only Levitical priests
Who could perform 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 him Messiah, the Anointed One!

And at same time

She prepared his body for burial.

Never before had someone been consecrated king

And prepared for burial

In one anointing

And not by a priest but by a woman.

How profound is that?

She ministered to him

When everyone else was clueless

To what was happening.

“She has done a beautiful thing.”

A beautiful thing indeed!

Now if it was Mary Magdalene who 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 you wanted to express your love in someone

In one deliberate act, short of dying for them

What would it be? How would you do it?

Well, this is how she did it.

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

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Another of my favorite movies is Babette's Feast

It is based on the book written by Isak Dinesen
 The author of Out of Africa.

It takes place in a 19th century Danish village.

Two sisters lead a very strict and austere life
 Centered around their father
 A local retired minister
 And their local church

Either of the sisters
 Could have left their bleak existence
 For a better life away.

But their father firmly objected
 And consequently, they stayed single
 Caring for their aging father.

Many years later
 Their father now deceased

They take in a French refugee Babette Hersant.

She works for them as a servant

She comes from a more sophisticated life

But she humbly serves the two sisters.

She learns to cook their drab and monotonous meals

Of white fish and porridge

To her good fortune, Babette wins the lottery.

She wants to show her kindness

To the two sisters for taking her in.

And asks if she could cook a French meal for them

On the 100th anniversary of their father's birth.

They reluctantly agree.

She sends for all kinds of wonderful foods

And good wines and liqueur from France

And spends days preparing a terrific French menu.

She invites the friends and neighbors of the two sisters

And they all enjoy the culinary delights.

A wonderful feast that will be talked about for years..

After a lengthy clean-up and rest
The sisters ask Babette

Now that she has won the lottery
She has enough money
To return to her home in France

Babette replied, no, she had not such plans.

“And besides,” Babette said
“I have spent all of the winnings on the feast.”
“I have nothing left.”

She wanted to express her love for their kindness
And spent everything she had to do so
Forsaking the ability to return to her beloved France.

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If God wanted to express his love for us
In one intentional act

What would God do?
How would God do it?

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

For isn't dying on behalf of not just someone
But everyone the ultimate expression of love?

And indeed, Christ died for us.

1 John 3:1 NIV See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Jesus did what he could.

And HE has done a beautiful thing.