

GREETINGS - CELEBRATING 25 YEARS!

THE ALABASTER LIFE - MARK 14:1-11 - GOD'S EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

Who is the Source? Why are we here? What is our purpose? God's extravagant love birthed this church 25 years ago.

The story is also told in John 12 and Matthew 26; Luke 7 - probably a different occasion.

A beautiful act that is bracketed by brutality.

Verses 1 and 2: *After two days it was the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a treacherous way to arrest and kill Him. ² "Not during the festival," they said, "or there may be rioting among the people."*

Why the fear of rioting? John says (John 12:11) that they wanted to kill Jesus and Lazarus 'because He was the reason many of them of the Jews were deserting them and believing in Jesus.'

Verse 3: *While He was in Bethany at the house of Simon who had a serious skin disease, as He was reclining at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of pure and expensive fragrant oil of nard. She broke the jar and poured it on His head.*

How ironic; a resurrection party just days before his death. Simon's house - father of the trio? John tells us that this woman is Mary

Two valuable items - a double gift - the alabaster jar and the fragrant oil of nard. The expensive perfume was in the expensive vase. This could have been Mary's inheritance; or that of the entire family. Nard was used for honoring guests, anointing kings - and burying loved ones; it's still used today in many places in Asia for palliative care...

John tells us that she used her hair to wash his feet; the fragrant oil filled the house. She does this both for gratitude for what He had done (raising Lazarus) - and for what He was about to face...

Responsible, prudent? There is this element of abandon. Who cares? Jesus is all that matters!

Everyone was always after him - the seeker, the sick, the hungry, the looky-loos...they wanted something from him; not because they necessarily loved him. Might this be the one instance where someone comes to him not asking him for anything - but is coming to give him something and to honor him?

It must have been lonely for the Christ. Her action is an oasis of honor in a desert of plotting and brutality.

Verses 4-7: *But some were expressing indignation to one another: "Why has this fragrant oil been wasted? ⁵ For this oil might have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor." And they began to scold her. ⁶ Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a noble thing for Me. ⁷ You always have the poor with you, and you can do what is good for them whenever you want, but you do not always have Me.*

John mentions Judas by name; if Judas was correct - this would have been about \$25,000; his value system was so different - instead of giving Jesus \$25K, he would betray for about \$1,000 (the value of 30 pieces of silver).

Intensely personal - some translations use the word beautiful - this mattered to Jesus. This brought him great joy.

Don't read this as an excuse to not help the poor. Make the most of your opportunities. Mary knows, this is her chance. Go - break the vase.

Deuteronomy 15:11 - For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, 'You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.'

Verses 8-9: *She has done what she could; she has anointed My body in advance for burial. ⁹ I assure you: Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her."*

She did what she could. She gave what she had - and she held nothing back.

We are fulfilling this prophecy today - we are telling the story - just as Jesus said we would.

Look at how lavish this display of love is. Three hundred day's wages! Gone in a moment of lavish affection. Think what she could have bought with this! But her brother is alive. And Jesus is the one who raised him and Jesus is the reason its worth living. He is the resurrection *and* the life.

There is no measuring the value of Jesus. There is no quantifying his worth. So there is no way to calculate the cost of love. There is no way to put the heart in a scale and say, this much affection for Jesus and no more. Jesus is inexpressibly wonderful, and Mary is inexpressibly affectionate. They match.

"It is a beautiful thing when the *worth* of Jesus and the *love* of his followers match—when the *value of his perfections* and the *intensity*

of our affections correspond.” And it is *not* beautiful, but suicidal, when they don’t.

The anointing at Bethany...the passion a week later:

- At Bethany, Mary takes the role of the slave...washing his feet. A week later Jesus is the slave, washing the feet of his disciples
- At Bethany, Jesus is anointed in life; a week later, he will be anointed in death
- At Bethany, there is this extravagant act; a year’s worth of wages was poured out; in Jerusalem a week later, Jesus’s blood would be poured out in extravagant love for this broken world in devotion to His Father
- At Bethany, a jar is broken; in Jerusalem, His body will be broken. Love is costly; grief is the price we pay for love.

Love really wins.

Verses 10 and 11: *Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to hand Him over to them. ¹¹ And when they heard this, they were glad and promised to give him silver.^[a] So he started looking for a good opportunity to betray Him.*

Mary in contrast to Judas...gratitude or envy as the mark of your life...

- Mary prepares Jesus for his death by this anointing; Judas prepares Jesus for his death by laying the groundwork for his betrayal
- Mary is lavish in her love; Judas is calculating in his devotion to his own plans
- Mary is motivated by love; Judas by envy and greed
- Mary actually does something; Judas only talks about helping the poor; John calls him a thief - he saw this act as a setback for himself

Love always seems wasteful to those who don’t love

When’s the last time you broke a vase for Jesus? When’s the last time you let your hair down for the sake of the Kingdom?

As a church - do something extravagant.

Are we convinced that God expects us to break a vase?

And when you did it - he loved it.

What if God were stingy with you?

Do you recognize God’s extravagant love to you?

The more generous you are, the more capacity you be created in you to grasp the extravagance of his generosity to you.

The less generous you are - you will never think God has done enough.

Courage to live a recklessly wise life of love?

Early Church History - Cyprian - the world is wet with blood and murder - Christians are being persecuted: *“It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are Christians. . . and I am one of them.”*

JOHN 12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint^[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.^[b]” ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as

keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you,^[c] but you will not always have me.”

⁹ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

Remembering this past season:

- What are treasures to be celebrated?
- What are wounds to be healed?
- What are losses to be grieved?
- What are changes to be acknowledged?

CLOSING THOUGHTS - BENEDICTION