

Valuable Oil Matthew 26:6-13

Sermon for April 3, 2022, by Rev. Alex Creager

⁶ Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. ⁸ But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste? ⁹ For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.” ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Who are the people we often look past?

What are the gifts that we often ignore?

Imagine for a minute that you are there in Simon’s house. You have followed Jesus from Jerusalem, where he has just been teaching and arguing in the Temple, to this small town of Bethany. You are hoping to hear a new message. See a new miracle – maybe he will heal Simon’s leprosy? Maybe he will go out in the streets and feed the crowds. But as the group of you sit down at a table, a woman comes up to Jesus. You don’t know her name or where she is from. You don’t actually notice her that much at first. Except that as she gets closer you see that she is holding a beautiful alabaster jar.

And before anyone can stop her, she walks up to Jesus, cracks the jar open and pours out all of what is inside upon his head. It is the finest, most wonderful smelling ointment you have ever smelled. But it still is all over Jesus. You are shocked. This woman has just interrupted Jesus’ visit. And more than that, she has wasted a full jar of this very expensive oil. The other disciples tell you they could have sold it for a huge sum of money.

Everyone looks at Jesus, expecting him to stand up and scold her like he scolded the religious leaders earlier today. But as all eyes move from this woman to Jesus, he doesn't get angry with the woman. He praises her. He tells his disciples, "she has performed a good service for me." And then more than that he tells them, "whenever the gospel, whenever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

This woman, whose name we don't even know, is part of the gospel story. Her daring action and praise is part of the good news of Jesus Christ. Because she has taken that risky, daring step to act out of love.

And what Jesus values above all else is our acts of love. Our acts of worship. Our acts of care. Jesus knows he is about to go to the cross. He knows he must do it mostly alone. But as he is about to pour out so much love and grace upon the world, he treasures this moment of care and love, touch and smell, closeness and compassion. This is what Jesus prizes above all else.

More than the greatest buildings, the biggest projects, the best new startups – it is these moments and actions and love that mean the most.

For a lot of us, the gifts, and talents we often minimize are the ones inside of ourselves. When we think of gifts of service, gifts of love, gifts of proclaiming Christ's gospel to the world, we often think of famous names – names like King and Teresa and Tutu. And those people have definitely poured out their own ointments of love upon Christ and upon the world.

But this story of the woman in Bethany reminds us that we don't have to be famous or rich or well-known to be a part of Christ's work in the world. We just have to be bold and loving and do what might be surprising and even shocking to the world.

For some here, your valuable ointment is making prayer shawls and blessing them for those who are sick. For others it is working outside like we did last weekend, creating a beautiful space for children to play, people to meditate and family members to celebrate loved ones. For others it is going to Bainbridge or FeedMore or, when we are able to get back inside, Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center, and offering your hands and feet to care and help.

For many of you it is cooking meals each Wednesday night to welcome people into fellowship and warm suppers after a very difficult two years apart. And this Tuesday night a number of you will be pouring out your own ointment of love by gathering at the Nehemiah Acton Day, taking your time and energy, and boldly speaking up for our steps we believe can have a huge positive impact on the health, safety, and homes of our neighbors.

All of us gathered here this day have gifts, have love, have something to offer. We may not always believe it is that much. But in Christ's eyes, it is greater than the most expensive treasure. In Christ's view, your love, your care, your daring action means the world. It means everything. The gospel of Jesus Christ invites you in, to be a part of this story, to carry on its grace, and to trust that you are a needed part of this story. Amen.