

Mark 14:1-9

March 17, 2019

“I Tell You the Truth . . . Fruits of Faith Will Be Remembered”

Our Redeemer

2nd Sunday in Lent

Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

[Introduction]

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

I want you to imagine you just received a new email. It’s from Simon the leper and it says, “Pre-Passover Party at my house. Tenth of Nisan. Supper served at the 12th hour. You won’t want to miss it.” Cordially, Simon.

Sounds fun! Good food and a good time are guaranteed. You wonder if any of Simon’s cousins are going to be there. It’s been a while since you’ve seen Hannah. It’d be great to catch up with her again. So you scroll down the guest list. Ah, good, Hannah is going to be there, or at least she’s invited. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are going to be there too. Peter is invited. So are James and John.

You keep scrolling down and then you see it. Jesus. Jesus is going to be there! Any thought of clicking “Maybe” for your RSVP quickly changes to a definite “Yes.” Simon was right—you won’t want to miss it.

[A Great Offering]

Party day arrives, and you get decked out in your finest Passover garb. The laughter from Simon’s house can be heard as you turn onto his street. They’re all there. You can see Judas and James through the window.

You walk in and the feast is sprawled out on the table before you. But you hardly notice the warm bread and variety of olive oils for dipping. The “Hellos” and “May I get you something to drink?” float right past your ears.

Your focus is on the two people reclining at the table. Mary is at Jesus’ feet holding an expensive alabaster jar filled with what could have only been costly perfume. You can see the appreciation and love well up in her eyes as you watch her break the neck of that jar and pour the whole amount over Jesus head, every last drop so that it drips even to his feet.

[A Scandalous Offering]

For many, it was the sweetest scent they had ever smelled. In Jesus' own words, it was a beautiful thing that Mary did.

But that's not how everyone saw it. There were some who watched in horror as she broke the costly jar. They didn't see her sacrifice as beautiful. All they could see being poured out was the money that could have been used in so many other ways. "This could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor," they said. "Why are you being so wasteful?"

Even Jesus' disciples rebuked Mary. They weren't thinking about Jesus and the beautiful offering she had given him. Even those closest to him were only concerned about how much the jar of perfume cost.

What about us? How many times do we turn away from opportunities to give offerings to our Lord? How many times do we decide Jesus isn't worth that much money or that much time?

Maybe we're worried about what people will think if we said we were busy volunteering at church, or when we go out of our way to be kind to the person everyone else avoids. Maybe our schedules are too full to give any more time to studying scripture and praying.

In our world time is a limited commodity, and it's easy to start pushing Jesus to the backburner, especially when we tell ourselves we can always start giving more to God when life slows down.

[The Ultimate Offering]

But in the end it all comes down to this question, "Is Jesus worth it?"

Is Jesus worth our time?

Our money?

Our sacrifice?

The world in which we live shouts, "No!" The selfish voice inside of me shouts, "No!" And, unfortunately, all my past words and actions shout, "No!" But then we come here on these Sunday mornings (Saturday evenings).

When God's Word compels us to repent, the center stage is cleared for the One who alone is worthy to be Lord. As we hear the familiar passion history read week after week, we are reminded that it was not Mary who went too far with her

offering, but God himself. He went overboard when that which he broke was not an alabaster jar full of perfume, but rather what he poured out completely—his only Son. When he did that, the fragrance of the words, “Father, forgive them,” filled the world.

From the soft cry in the manger to the agonizing cry on the cross, God was saying something to devils, to demons, and to death itself. God was saying he was determined to save the world, no matter the cost. God was saying he was determined to save you, no matter the cost. *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”*

Love gives. Love is not love if it neatly calculates the cost. When the Holy Spirit leads us to fathom and appreciate the cost of God’s love for us, something miraculous happens.

Like Mary, we love—without calculating the cost—we love, because he first loved us. With smiles on our faces and joy in our hearts, we’ll break our own alabaster jars, being less logical and more generous, less analytical and more compassionate, less self-centered and more Christ-centered, less concerned about others’ thoughts and more anxious to honor the One who loved us.

As we see ourselves doing just that, know that it won’t just be Mary’s fruits of faith that will be remembered by her Savior. Yours will be remembered as well. When he comes back, he’ll applaud, *“When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you invited me in”* (see Mt 25:35).

Half the time, we’re not even going to realize we did it. Why? Because our focus was on our Savior who loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. It was on his love that drove him to the cross. It was on his love that kept him on the cross.

And that is why when we survey his wondrous cross this Lenten season, we sing,

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen. (CW 125:4)

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
