

April 3, 2022 ~ Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sermon - Being a Mary in a Martha World

Scripture - John 12:1-8, CTW Psalm 126

Hymns - 88, 255, 154

Theme- Mary's act of love and humility may have seemed foolish and insignificant to those watching that day. But to Jesus, it was of utmost importance. How can we translate Mary's actions into our own action plan to show our own love and humility for Christ?

I. Introduction: Recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, this is a very beautiful and touching story of a woman who, out of love and appreciation for Jesus, anointed Him with a very precious and aromatic ointment. The woman who performed this loving act was none other than Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha of Bethany, who were close friends of Jesus.

A. Summarizing all three gospel accounts, Simon, a former leper, invited Jesus and His disciples, along with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, to a supper in Jesus' honor.

As a point of interest, let me remind you that to eat with an unhealed leper, would have rendered all the participants ceremonially unclean. So don't let the title "Simon the Leper" confuse you. The Great Physician had healed this man.

We're not told what the relationship was between Lazarus, his sisters, and Simon. But their closeness is implied by the fact that Martha helped serve the meal in Simon's house.

Simon and Lazarus definitely had things in common, since both of them had experienced the miraculous power of Christ in their lives: Simon having been healed of leprosy (**Mark 1:40**), and Lazarus having been raised from the dead (**John 11: 38-44**). This may have been the reason for the meal in the first place.

Characteristic of Martha, she jumped right in to help serve the meal. This brings out a distinct contrast between Martha and Mary. Martha is always depicted as working for Jesus, while Mary is always depicted as worshiping Jesus.

B. To put this another way: Martha labored for Jesus, while Mary listened to Jesus. Both qualities are important in the Christian life.

At some point while Jesus was reclining at the table, Mary brought in a flask containing a precious ointment, and anointed His head and feet. However, John's gospel, attempting to focus on the loving humility of Mary's act, only mentions the anointing of Christ's feet.

This was an act of sincere love and appreciation on Mary's part. But it wasn't only an act of **appreciation**. According to Jesus, this was also an act done in **anticipation**. Mary had apparently understood what the disciples had not. Jesus was about to die for the sins of the world.

There are some great truths to be learned from Mary's loving act of worship. Let's search them out together.

II. This Was An Act Of Sacrifice, Which Expended Great Cost

A. Mary's Actions in John 12:3, 5, NIV

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. Judas said: ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages

NOTE: Though he wasn't really concerned about the poor, as he'd implied, Judas said that this ointment could have been sold for "three hundred pence;" actually three hundred denarii (v.5). That amounts to about 60 dollars. One commentator notes: "The value of the perfume was a year's wages ("300 denarii"), perhaps a lifetime of savings."

This ointment was expensive because it was "Oil from a plant grown in northern India, very costly as an import into Palestine."

Another thing that needs to be noted here is the fact that Mary, in love, gave her very best for Jesus. The monetary size of Mary's gift to Jesus is not the issue here; it's the sacrifice that was involved.

Thomas Paine once said, "What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: 'Tis dearness only that gives everything its value." That is a good thing for all of us to think about when it comes to our giving for Christ!

B. Mary Experienced Grievous Criticism.

Judas, along with the other disciples, said that this was a great waste.

Matt.26:8 reminds us of that: "But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is this waste? ⁹ For this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor."

NOTE: Judging from the separate accounts given in the gospels, my conclusion was that Judas Iscariot probably got the criticism started (**John 12:4-5**), and the rest of the disciples joined in.

C. Jesus said that what Mary had done was a good work.

Matt. 26:10b "Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me."

One thing that can be gleaned from the criticism surrounding Mary's act of worship and devotion to Jesus is that we need not concern ourselves with the criticism of others, as long as our Lord approves. If we have His approval, that's all that matters. We simply need to keep serving Him.

The story is told of a judge who had been frequently ridiculed by a conceited lawyer. When asked by a friend why he didn't rebuke his assailant, he replied, "In our town lives a widow who has a dog. And whenever the moon shines, it goes outside and barks all night." Having said that, the magistrate shifted the conversation to another subject.

Finally someone asked, "But Judge, what about the dog and the moon?" "Oh," he replied, "fact is the moon went on shining regardless what the dog had to say about it-that's all."

III. This Was An Act Of Submissiveness

A. Mary Demonstrated Great Humility.

John 12:3a “³ Then Mary took about a **pint** 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.

NOTE: The term “pint” is translated from the Greek word “...litra, a measure of about twelve ounces.”

The **amount** of Mary’s offering however, is not as important as the **attitude** in which it was offered. For one thing, Mary likely had to be on her knees to perform this act of adoration. “Mary is always associated with the feet of Jesus (Lk.10: 39; Jn.11: 32), therefore Mary is a picture of a **humble** and **submissive** servant of Christ.

Luke 10:39 “And Martha had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.”

Remember the story in **John 11:32** “Then when Mary came to where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Don’t fail to notice another important fact of what Mary did. She not only anointed Christ’s feet, but she wiped them with the very hair of her head.

The Bible says that a woman’s long hair “...is a glory to her..” (**I Cor. 11:15a**). In a very real sense, Mary submitted her glory to Jesus, for His glory. **This is a tremendous picture of humility.**

B. Mary Deemed Jesus Worthy Of Great Honor.

Mark 14:6b “leave her alone, she has done a good thing for me”.

One commentator reminds us that to **anoint the head** was the more common service of friendship or honor, but Mary went further and **anointed even his feet**. It is plain from the Savior’s expressions about the similar anointing in Galilee (Luke 7:44-46), that to anoint the feet was an act of greater humility and profound respect.

Commentator **Thomas Carlyle** once said, “Show me the man you honor, and I will know what kind of man you are.”

People today would do well to take that statement to heart. A lot of America's accolades and honor is wasted on people who deserve it the least.

IV. This Was An Act Of Symbolism

A. It Symbolized Mary's Sincere Love. Folks, when Mary poured out that expensive ointment, which had likely cost her a year's wages, and anointed Jesus, she was in essence, pouring out a part of herself for her Lord.

A year of her life had gone into the purchase of that ointment. And believe me, she would not have lightly parted with something so valuable. You know what? That's what we are all doing when we give our tithes and offerings through this church. We are giving a part of ourselves, our time, and our energy.

On May 2, 1962, a dramatic advertisement appeared in the San Francisco Examiner: "I don't want my husband to die in the gas chamber for a crime he did not commit. **I will therefore offer my services for 10 years as a cook, maid, or housekeeper to any leading attorney who will defend him and bring about his vindication.**"

One of San Francisco's greatest attorneys, **Vincent Hallinan**, heard about the ad and contacted **Gladys Kidd**, who had placed it. Her husband, **Robert Lee Kidd**, was about to be tried for the slaying of an elderly antique dealer. **Kidd's** fingerprints had been found on a bloodstained ornate sword in the victim's shop.

During the trial, **Hallinan** proved that the antique dealer had not been killed by the sword, and that **Kidd's** fingerprints and blood on the sword got there because **Kidd** had once toyed with it while playfully dueling with a friend when they were both in the shop.

The jury, after 11 hours, found **Kidd** to be not guilty. Attorney **Hallinan** refused **Gladys Kidd's** offer of 10 years' servitude, even though she gladly and without hesitation, still MADE IT!

B. That ointment with which Mary anointed Jesus was a symbol of her love and devotion for her Lord. Don't miss the significance of the phrase at the end of verse three: "...**And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.**"

The sweet smell of Mary's love for Jesus permeated the whole house. Not only that, but since Mary had wiped the excess ointment from Jesus' feet with her hair, the essence of the perfume followed her everywhere she went for days to come.

What's my point? Simply this: When a person truly loves Jesus, it will be obvious to others with whom they come in contact.

Can the people you deal with on a daily basis detect that you love the Lord; or does your life and attitude give off the stench of bitterness and indifference? It's a question we need to ask ourselves.

B. It Symbolized The Master's Sacrificial Life.

Matt. 26:12 ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.

John 12:7 ⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.

Think about it, when Mary broke that alabaster bottle, releasing the fragrant essence inside, it symbolized the broken body of Jesus, on the Cross of Calvary, as He suffered for the sins of the world.

When Mary poured out the sweet-smelling contents of that container, it symbolized the precious blood of Christ, which was poured out for sinners, that they might know God's forgiveness.

Eph. 5:2 says, "and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Rom. 5:8-9 ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

C. Mark adds a beautiful footnote to this story that we all would do well to remember: Mark 14:9 ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Amen? Let Us Pray...

