

## LAVISH JESUS WITH PRAISE!



**Scripture:**

**Isaiah 43:18-21**

<sup>18</sup>Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. <sup>19</sup>I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. <sup>20</sup>The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, <sup>21</sup>the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

**John 12:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” <sup>6</sup>(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup>Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



Certain fragrances jog our memories, like the Old Spice my Dad used to wear, the aroma of barbecued hamburgers permeating backyards. The fresh baked chocolate chip cookie smell is a favorite of mine, too. I recently learned that “Scent Marketing” is more than spraying you with perfume when you walk into a store hoping you will want to buy it. Cinnabon intentionally bakes a fresh

batch of cinnamon rolls every thirty minutes to keep the delicious smell permeating the malls where they are located. Starbucks very intentionally directs their coffee bean scent toward the door so when you walk past you will smell it outside. But scents are powerful communicators. Remember Nirvana had a song called “Smells like Team Spirit”?

I'm so glad the days are past when I had to wash my kids' soccer uniforms after a sweaty hot game. I often had to hold my nose!

### **OIL OF NARD**

The oil of nard that Mary used to anoint Jesus feet was known to be wonderfully fragrant and that helps explain why it was so expensive.

In today's reading the woman at the feet of Jesus was communicating love and honor to Jesus with her gift of nard. Somehow Mary knew this was her last chance to show her love, gratitude and affection for Jesus.

Nard is an aromatic amber-colored essential oil derived from a flowering plant that grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India.

Remember when I pointed out that the Silk Road that came out of the East went directly through Jerusalem? This nard oil probably made a three-thousand-mile journey to get to Jerusalem for Mary to buy it. Today they estimate it would cost in the tens of thousands of dollars for such precious oil. Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus most likely pooled their money to buy such a precious gift for Jesus.

### **WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

If you were Mary and planning to be in his presence how would you respond to the opportunity to be with Jesus, who recently raised your brother from the dead? Would you spend the time with Jesus asking questions like: What is heaven like?

Or would you listen at his feet to his wise words? Would you tell him a joke, sing him a song or play him a tune?

What would you do if you knew this was your last chance to show him how much you love him? It would take a lot of guts to put expensive oil on Jesus would it not.

Mary decides to quietly but intentionally lavish her love on Jesus in the form of precious oil. She totally ignores the shocked response from the disciples around them. Her

purpose is to give Christ something that shows her praise, love, and gratitude.

If you think about it, she is the only one in history to give Jesus a gift since the three wisemen brought their gifts to the baby Jesus. Normally, Jesus was giving out healing and forgiveness. But this time Jesus accepts her gift and allows her to shower him with praise through the offering of the precious fragrant oil.

### **DON'T HOARD SOMETHING GOOD FOR LATER**

Mary had a lavish attitude like that of writer, Annie Dillard, who said: "Spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all right way, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place. Give it, give it all, give it now." She also added: "The impulse to save something good for a better place later is the signal to spend it now! Something more will arise later, something better! These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes." That reminds me of the fires.

That is Annie Dillard's advice for writing and for life.

### **SAY WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE**

Mary was present in the moment with Jesus and she was willing to respond with her heart. These last moments with Jesus inspired Mary to give an act of reckless beauty. She somehow knew it was her last opportunity to lavish him with something that showed how much he meant to her.

**I sincerely believe when you have an opportunity to say what you have always wanted to say it is best to say it before it is too late.**

There are five things especially important to say to someone you love before they die. I recommend these five things:

1. Please forgive me.
2. I forgive you for anything you may be feeling you need forgiveness for. (When you offer your forgiveness to a loved one, you give them a final gift of passing in peace even if there has been no major act to forgive. It is a nice thing to say.)
3. I Love you.
4. Thank you for loving me and for all the things you have done for me.
5. I will be okay; it is okay to go when you need to. I will never forget you.

### **MARY SHOWED ABUNDANT LOVE**

Mary may have been silently saying these things as she applied the precious oil onto Jesus. We don't know if any words were said, the oil provided a fragrance of love. Mary doesn't wait until it is too late. She role models showing Christ her abundant love. And by wiping the nard on Jesus with her hair, she carries the precious scent away with her.

### **THE FRAGRANT MEMORY**

The fragrant memory clings to her and when Jesus pours out his life and forgiveness on the cross, she will have the same scent as Jesus. It is as if she finds a way to be on the cross with him.

Maybe the scent of nard continued to stay with her and gave her strength to face the next few days. Like the scent of a favorite security blanket. She might have tried to keep that fragrant memory for as long as possible.

Mary's unique connection to Jesus is probably the reason she is given the honor of being among the first women who find his tomb empty. It is this same Mary who runs to Peter announcing He is Risen! She is the first preacher of the Gospel, the one who shared the Good News of his resurrection; she likely still had the fragrance she shared with Christ

in her hair. (They didn't wash that often then.)

How do we carry the fragrance of Christ with us? How do we carry his kingdom of compassion out into the world? We are called to do just that, to spread the Good News and to lavish praise and love on Jesus still today. We should do it not because he desires the lavishing, but because we are made better for it. We are strengthened with the fragrant memory of all that Jesus did for us.

Imagine pouring out the most precious gifts you have at the feet of Christ. We can be connected still today to Jesus in this way. Jesus said, "When you do these things for the least of these you do them for me."

That is the only gift Jesus wanted from his followers then and now. Matthew 25 says that his disciples asked him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

Precious nard is not needed now. What the world needs now is your tender loving care on Christ's behalf, for the least of these. I hope you will lavish your care upon Jesus today, in this way. Amen

### **Benediction:**

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen**



**The Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway  
Presbyterian Church of the Roses  
2500 Patio Court  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**

