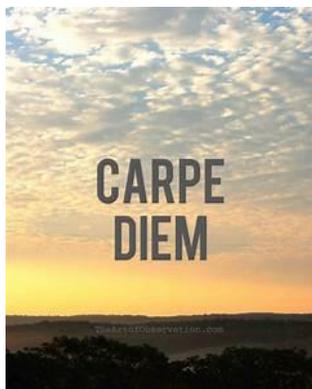


John 12:1-11

1Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3Mary 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. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6(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.) 7Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8You always have the poor with you, **but you do not always have me.**” 9When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

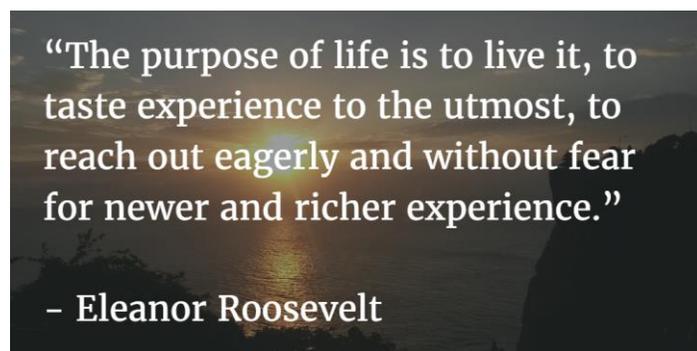
Sermon – April 3, 2022 – Lent 5

Carpe Diem! Have you heard that expression? It means ‘Seize the Day’! I think that is just what Mary did in this morning’s Gospel when she poured a whole jar of costly nard perfume on Jesus’ feet.



Sieze the Day - that is what Mary did

Eleanor Roosevelt said it a little differently.



The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.

I think that is what Mary of Bethany did when she anointed Jesus' feet. She reached out without fear, she took a risk for a rich and memorable experience, not only for herself, but for generations afterwards.

First let's Set the Stage

It is six days before the Passover. This is to be the last week of Jesus' life. Jesus comes to Bethany where his friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus lived. Bethany is a village on the slope of the Mount of Olives about 1.5 miles (2.4 km) to the east of Jerusalem. The oldest house there today is a 2,000-year-old dwelling reputed to have been the House of Martha and Mary. It is a popular pilgrimage site.^[2] We could go there. John writes in the previous chapter that Jesus 'loved Martha and his sister and Lazarus'. (Jn 11:5) Jesus had only recently raised Lazarus from the dead. They were enjoying a meal. It seems Mary, Martha and Lazarus were not dirt poor. They put on a meal for Jesus and not for the first time.

But it seems to me, Mary has a sense that the storm clouds are gathering around Jesus. He is not safe. Time is running out. Paradoxically, raising Lazarus to life, has seriously threatened **Jesus'** life. The authorities are determined to be rid of Jesus and Lazarus too.

So Mary seizes the day and pays homage to Jesus. She anoints Jesus' feet with an entire pound of very expensive perfume made from pure nard; Nard that has come from the faraway slopes of the Himalayas; Nard that is used as an important component of priestly liturgy in the temple in Jerusalem.

Did you know that you can actually purchase nard on Amazon? Really, it is true. Here is a 30 ml bottle of Nard from the Magdalena company straight from



Jerusalem – only \$15!

Nard is a flowering plant of the valerian family that grows in the Himalayas of Nepal, China, and India. The plant grows to about 1 meter (3 ft) in height and has pink, bell-shaped flowers. It is found at an altitude of about 3,000 to 5,000 m (9,800 to 16,400 ft). Rhizomes (underground stems) can be crushed and distilled into an intensely aromatic amber-colored essential oil with thick consistency. Nard oil is used as a perfume, an incense, and a herbal medicine.^[1]

Spikenard the rhizomes
Are pressed to make the
oil





Little jars – Mary would have carried the nard in a jar like one of these.

Now to comparisons

Are there similarities between Mary's and Jesus' actions. Jesus, just a few days later, will humbly wash the feet of his disciples before their last supper as Mary does this night. He will wash his disciples' feet to demonstrate the leader's role as servant. Mary pours out an extravagant amount of costly perfume. She uses all she has. Jesus will pour out his own blood, all he has, extravagantly offering his very life to wash us clean once and for all. What a fragrance that gives off.



So Jesus accepts the very personal and physical gesture of esteem from Mary, allowing her hands to wash his feet and her hair to touch his skin. He is the incarnation...God in a body...so he lets this almost sacramental event happen. Judas says what about the poor? But the 'poor' are 'out there'. Tonight poor Jesus in the body, Jesus' presence is with them. This will not last. These moments are precious. So fill the house with a beautiful aroma. As Jesus himself says '...you do not always have me.'



And one could say Jesus himself represents the poor. He did not even have a proper place to be born. During his ministry, he had nowhere permanent to lay his head. He had no wealth. He was supported by the kindness and generosity of others, many women. Mary in a symbolic sense was supporting Jesus poor himself and champion of the poor.



**“The future depends on
what you do today.”
– Mahatma Gandhi**

Jesus says in Matthew and Mark these words, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her"



We all try to escape and deny death. But we cannot avoid it. Until our Lord comes again for the restoration of the earth and our Resurrection, we all will die. We only have so much time. Better to ‘seize the day’, to take every opportunity to show our love, not afraid to even be extravagant about it, after all, our Lord expressed his love extravagantly. Whenever we help one of the least, we are ministering to Him. Christ is the face in everyone we meet.

Elisa Morgan in her book “She Did What She Could,” asked a question. When Jesus was on the cross, could he still smell the costly perfume Mary of Bethany had anointed him with only days before? Did it comfort him, this reminder of his friend's love, as he was dying in agony in front of women who loved him too much to avert their eyes?

May we take with us the image of Mary at Jesus' feet, tenderly washing them, pouring out her love extravagantly. She is remembered for this centuries later...as our Lord Jesus is remembered and he can be encountered by us, every day if we just seize the day! Amen

Sermon prep notes

For us, when we smell the aroma of Mary's perfume rising up off the biblical page, we know it has something to do with death but by faith and through grace, we also sense that there is a definite sweetness to this aroma—it actually feels like the kind of thing that might move right through death to arrive at a higher life.

"Mary seems to have been the only one who was sensitive to the impending death of Jesus and who was willing to give a material expression of her esteem for him. Jesus' reply shows his appreciation of her act of devotion."^[6] The accounts in Matthew and Mark adds these words of Jesus, "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her"

But maybe we are being too literal here. As noted above, death hangs heavy in the air here. So heavy, in fact, that perhaps it was true that to Jesus' mind, there was no significant difference between everything happening in that final week of his life and the nitty-gritty details of his actual entombment. He was as good as dead already. He was, to borrow a phrase a "dead man walking." So whatever Mary may have had in mind in pouring this onto Jesus, Jesus himself regarded it as yet another indication of death.

We are told in verse 3 that "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume," and no doubt most dinner guests regarded it as pleasant. Lazarus was alive again. Martha had, as usual, outdone herself in the kitchen and was serving up a dandy meal. Mary now honored the guest of honor with a traditional ritual of hospitality. What a fine evening!

Only Jesus seems to know that in this world, without someone's being able to make the ultimate sacrifice for sins, even the finest evening is shot-through with death. Without the hope that Jesus' death alone would make possible for this death-enthralled world, no amount of perfume, no amount of glitz, no amount of red-carpet gala events can ever escape the fact that we're all on a collision course with death. Jesus alone seemed to know this that night. As latter-day followers of Jesus, we need to know it, too, and so do all we can to point our world to Jesus as our only hope.

We all try to escape and deny death. But it doesn't work. Not finally and not for all the money in the world. Jesus knows it and knows what to do about it. If we are Jesus' disciples, then we know what needs doing, too. That's why in Lent, and always, we're not ashamed to cling to that old rugged cross.

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In the fine story and film *Babette's Feast* we see an example of sacrificial self-giving in action. We also see how such sacrifice can restore much that is broken in this world.

[Lavender](#) (genus *Lavandula*) was also known by the [ancient Greeks](#) as *nardos*, nard, after the Sanskrit *narada* or *nalada*.

a [flowering plant](#) of the [valerian](#) family that grows in the [Himalayas](#) of Nepal, China, and India. The plant grows to about 1 meter (3 ft) in height and has pink, bell-shaped flowers. It is found at an altitude of about 3,000 to 5,000 m (9,800 to 16,400 ft). [Rhizomes](#) (underground stems) can be crushed and distilled into an intensely aromatic amber-colored [essential oil](#) with thick consistency. Nard oil is used as a [perfume](#), an [incense](#), and an [herbal medicine](#).

perfumed offerings on the [altar of incense](#) in the time of the [Tabernacle](#) and the [First](#) and [Second Temple](#) period, and was an important component of priestly [liturgy](#) in the [Temple in Jerusalem](#)

Just as Jesus later washes his disciples' feet to demonstrate what radical love looks like, Mary expresses her love with a humble physical act. Jesus, rather than shunning her intimate gesture, receives Mary's gift into his own body with gratitude, tenderness, pleasure, and blessing. A Sabbath of the skin.

We are people of the Incarnation, called to break bread, share wine, shed tears, and wash feet. During this Lenten season, can we learn to see our embodied lives, our sensory lives, as fully implicated in our lives with God? Can we move past contempt, squeamishness, and fear, and offer him our whole selves?

What are you going to do, while you still have me?

Given the choice between an abstracted need (the poor "out there") and the concrete need that presents itself at her own doorstep, around her own dinner table, Mary chooses the here and now. She loves the body and soul who is placed in her presence. In doing so, she ends up caring for the one who is denied room at the inn — even to be born. For the one who has no place to lay his head during his years of ministry. For the one whose crucified body is laid in a borrowed tomb. In other words, it *is* the poor Mary serves when she serves Jesus. Just as it is always Jesus we serve when we love without reservation what God places in front of us, here and now.

Lutheran minister Reagan Humber puts it this way: "What won't always be with us is the opportunity to see God in whatever and whomever stands in front of us right now. The kingdom of God is here. Right now is the moment when God can break our hearts. The love of God is the grace of now."

Outline

Story – Appears in all 4 Gospels – Important

Nard –

Can buy on Amazon...next time

Valerian family – grows in the Himalyas Nepal, China and India

Used in the Temle as incense by priests

Life and Death

Lazarus has come back to life – but his return to life threatens Jesus life and his own

Plots to kill Jesus...his death is imminent

Does Mary sense this?

Mary is like Jesus Foreshadows Jesus

Washes his feet – humble service

Gives all at great cost – Jesus is about to give his very life...to pour out his blood out of love