

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



Mark 14:1-9

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

You don't have to be a "cheapskate" to feel the tension in this Gospel account. Even those who are slightly conservative with their money gasp at a \$15,000 bottle of perfume being used up in one moment. Any husband, or friend, or sister would quickly advise, "No! Make it last more than one night. Save some!"

Besides the incredible amount of money that was poured out from that single jar, most Bible commentators agree that this act was probably of questionable taste. It isn't just Americans who cannot imagine a dinner party being interrupted by an entire bottle of perfume being poured out inside someone's house; the Jews of Jesus' day were probably not accustomed to this type of display either.

From the Gospel of John, we know that the woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Lazarus had already been raised from the dead by Jesus. Mark's account doesn't include the timeline for this event; John's Gospel does. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. This story takes place right before Palm Sunday.

Mark tells us that some who were present voiced their shock and anger at this waste. John's Gospel tells us that Judas was the leading voice. The jar was worth a year's wages! Piety was added to the anger: The money would have been better used if it was given to the poor than if it was wasted in a single moment on Jesus. The accusation was that Mary had made a poor stewardship choice.

For a moment, Mary must have been crushed. She knew the value of the perfume. But she made a choice. She wanted to use this expensive jar of perfume in a single act of devotion to Jesus. And the first reaction is that **"they rebuked her harshly."**

Jesus quickly intervened on her behalf. **"Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She**

has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me." Jesus saw what others missed, and perhaps what others assumed wasn't there. Jesus saw the motive. He saw the gratitude and faith in the heart of this woman. This was not an act of waste by a woman who didn't know the value of the jar of perfume she owned. This was an act of faith by a woman who knew the value of Jesus in her life and who, by her own free will, made a choice to give a gift to Jesus. It may have been a gift that the others in the room wouldn't have given. Jesus never demanded this type of gift. But it was what Mary chose to do. It was the way that she decided to express her faith.

In the end, doesn't this account come down to the question: "Is Jesus worth it?" Is Jesus worth the sacrifice? The gift? The time? Inside each of us, our sinful natures say "No, Jesus is not worth it." My ways and my interests always seem best to me. Sadly, our actions often suggest that we don't think that Jesus is worth it. With full knowledge that we should stop the sinful behavior, we allow it to continue. Our anger gives us control over others. Our selfishness protects our self-interests. Our laziness protects us from failure or allows us to indulge our own desires. And when the piety of our fine sounding excuses is stripped away, we are often just saying, "Jesus, I don't have time for you now! It would interfere with what I'd like to do."

But Mary had a new heart. She was guided by her love for Jesus. She knew he was her Savior. She had seen his power over even death when Jesus raised her brother from the dead. Jesus commented that she was preparing him for his burial. Theologians debate if she knew this or not. If she had paid attention, Jesus frequently talked about the fact that he would die in Jerusalem. Although many of his closest disciples didn't understand this, perhaps Mary

did. On the other hand, maybe she didn't know what was coming in Jesus' work, but he did. He knew that within one week's time his dead body would be resting in a grave.

Regardless of how well Mary understood the details of the future, Mary did know that Jesus was the Savior. Jump ahead to today and the details are clear. In compassion and mercy for lost sinners, Jesus would suffer and die as punishment for our sins. Every excuse and moment of selfishness is forgiven by Jesus. The reality is that those who believe in Jesus are fully forgiven for their sins and will live in heaven.

That reality touched Mary's heart and guided her actions. Jesus commended the fruit of her faith, **"I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."** Jesus accepted the choice that she made to show her gratitude to him. Her choice wasn't required; but it was what she decided to do because of what Jesus had done for her.

How will you respond to what Jesus had done for you? Different people respond in different ways. This lesson warns us of the danger of thinking, "Why don't people do what I would do?" *Why give money for flooring in the church, it should go to missions? Why give money to missions, it should go to the Seminary? Why give money to the Seminary, it should go toward our school? Why give money to our school, it should go toward new pews in the church?* For every choice you question in others, your choices could be questioned. The fact is, fruits of faith are always good. Whatever good choice one person makes is . . . good. So is the good choice that you make. But to question the choice that another person makes, even when we cloak our concern in a pious alternative that we think is better, shows that we don't understand the fruits of faith.

This text also reminds us that the congregation that puts in a new organ instead of giving the money to missions hasn't done anything wrong. And if they chose to spend extra money on a good organ, because it is their Savior they will praise, we cannot condemn their generosity. Granted, you may not agree with the choices others make or that your congregation makes, but that doesn't mean your choices are right and others are wrong. Jesus warned against that thinking in our text. *You can help the poor; and you can praise me. Both are good and there is a time for each one.*

The fruits of faith cannot be prescribed or programmed. The gospel touches hearts in a unique way in each person. Some give money; others give time; others give unseen prayers.

While the fruits of faith are not mandated, neither are they unnoticed by our Savior. Two thousand years later we are still talking about what Mary did. God notices how his people respond. It may be personal and different from how other Christians respond, but the response of your heart is not a secret from God. As the message of Lent touches your heart with the overwhelming assurance of God's love, let your faith guide your response. Give a gift; offer your time; go into a corner in your house and pray. Your choice. God graciously gives you that choice and he also respects and notices that choice. Put your faith into practice with confidence that what you chose is acceptable to God because of Jesus. Amen.

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