

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Mark 14:1-9

14 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

²“But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages^[a] and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you,^[b] and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 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.”

Do you ever daydream? If so, how much? Are you embarrassed to answer the question? If you said you daydreamed 45% of your day away, you’d be below average.

People who study daydreams, and there are people who are seriously study daydreams, tell us that we daydream 47% of our day, yes 47% of our waking hours are spent, daydreaming.

People who study daydreams also tell us the daydreaming is good for us. It wakes up a bigger part of our brain and helps us become more creative and can even improve our mood.

Have you ever daydreamed during a sermon? Well, I want you to. Yes, I want you to daydream today and think about beautiful things, specifically, the beauty of helping people find Jesus through your own simple acts of devotion. I want you today, to daydream about the memory that you leave to your family and your friends; the way they remember you as a Christian, long after you have left this world, just like the woman in our text. The lady of whom Jesus said, **She has done a beautiful thing to me... 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.”**

When he said these words, Jesus is talking about what we would call a legacy. A legacy is the memory of what we’ve done on this earth. It’s the memory of our story, our life, our values and sense of purpose. And Jesus is talking about a special legacy, -- a Christian legacy. It’s the memory of our story, our life, our values and sense of purpose when it comes to honoring Jesus. A Christian legacy like Mary’s legacy, is a legacy worth looking at. Why, because Jesus tells us it is a beautiful thing!

A Her legacy shows determination, because a Christian legacy usually takes some determination

B Her legacy shows her devotion to Jesus, -- that's the goal of Christian legacy

Let's look at Mary's determination. It started with a dream of honoring Jesus.

At the time of Jesus, anointing a guest was a way of showing hospitality. When people arrived at your home, they didn't step out of an air conditioned car. They usually arrived on foot, coming out of the heat. They needed to freshen up a bit. It was good manners to provide your guests with a quick foot washing, and then some olive oil to use as a moisturizer for a person's dried out skin.

Anointing a guest with expensive oil was a way of bestowing the highest honor. Mary's oil was an expensive gift. We have every reason to believe that Judas was correct when he said it was worth a year's wages, about \$10,000 to \$12,000. This ointment, called Nard, was highly prized. It originated in the highlands of India and was transported by caravan across modern day Pakistan, Iran and Iraq. Today that's a 10 hour trip, by air. Back then it was a trip that would take months.

To prevent someone from stealing a little from every container to create an extra jar, the perfume was sealed in flask with a neck. To open the container, you snapped off the neck and poured out the contents. When that happened, it was dramatic! The aroma filled the room (John 12:3).

So Mary anointed Jesus, not only his head, but his feet, and wiped his feet with her hair. This was a way Mary showed deep humility and respect.

And what did the disciples think of Mary's act of determined love? She created some passionate discussion. OK. This case it was harsh criticism! The disciples watched her carry out her plan and were astonished. We don't know why they jumped on her act of determination and love, but they complained. Judas complained the loudest, **"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages"** (John 12:5)

So there was Mary, determined to give the costliest of gifts; determined to show her humility and respect; determined to do it no matter what the disciples thought. She never had to answer or explain why she did. Jesus did it for her when he said, **"She has done a beautiful thing to me...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."** This act became her legacy. We are talking about her today!

You see, action was about showing Jesus how much he meant to her. It was an act of devotion.

Remember who Mary was. This was the Mary who was the sister to Lazarus and Martha.

She and Martha were the ones, who when their brother Lazarus was sick, sent word to Jesus to ask him to come and heal him. Then they waited, and waited, and waited as they watched him weaken and die. They buried Lazarus, knowing that if Jesus had only come on time, Lazarus would still be alive. Jesus did come, after Lazarus was already buried. Then and only then did they see the purpose in Jesus' delay. Jesus used Lazarus' death as an opportunity to show his power over death. Standing before the tomb,

and to the surprise of all, he called to the dead man, “Lazarus come out.” And to the surprise of all, Lazarus came out, still wrapped in the grave clothes, but he was alive. So Mary was more convinced as ever. Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus was God. Jesus was her Savior. And Jesus, Messiah, God and Savior, gave her brother back to her.

This Mary was also the one who earlier in his minister, had Jesus as a visitor to her families’ home. Her sister Martha thought the most important thing they could do as a family for Jesus and his disciples was to put on a beautiful meal. Martha had it all planned out, including a key role for Mary, her sister. But this Mary had other plans. On the day that Jesus was there, she had a rare opportunity to be in a small group Bible study with Jesus as leader. Here she could get answers to her deepest questions about her faith. That left Martha stuck with all the meal preparation. So when Martha complained to Jesus that Mary was leaving her with all the work, Jesus said, ⁴¹ **“Martha, Martha,...“you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”** (Luke 10:41-42).

There a lot to like in Mary. She was devoted to her Savior. He was the priority in her life and by her determination to anoint him with this very special oil, no matter what people thought, she was willing to show it. The legacy she left us, according to Jesus, **was a beautiful thing.**

Application

It is a beautiful thing to do some daydreaming about the Christian legacy that we are leaving! I’m talking about your determination to have the people around you, especially your children and grandchildren, see that you are devoted to Jesus; that you are determined to show that devotion so that the people around you, your children and grandchildren, see that you are recommending, honoring and respecting him as your Savior.

You are doing that today, by attending church with regularity with your children. You do that with your prayers at home, at mealtime, at bedtime. You do that with family devotions.

That’s why for a Christian, it’s a natural thing to bring Christ into your estate plan. In fact, sharing your Christian legacy with your estate plan is typically the last time we get to do it and do it at a very impactful time.

How do you do that?

First, consider a Christian message to your family. It’s called a Christian preamble, - a simple paragraph that tells your heirs about the comfort and peace you have in Jesus, and asks them to be faithful to Jesus too.

Second, as you look at your minor children and identify the people you want to recommend as guardians for your children, choose people with high Christian values. In your will you can specify that you want your guardians to do all they can to provide your children with a Christian education.

Thirdly, consider making bequest, leaving a gift to your church in your estate plan. Why? Because it shows your heirs, even in your death, you are devoted to Jesus, and determined to show your devotion to Jesus.

Some Christian families have chosen to do it this way. They adopt Jesus as a son. To adopt Jesus means that if you have four children, you divide your estate five ways. One fifth goes to Jesus. If you have one child, you divide your estate two ways, and half goes to Jesus. Your Christian legacy gift can be directed to your church, our school, an area Lutheran High School, our synod's colleges, mission work, or the work of a group like The Lutheran Home Association. Think of the good work that this can do!

With a bequest, you show your devotion to Jesus, and teach a great lesson to all involved.

And with your bequest, you show your determination. To get it done, it requires you to set aside some time. You need to learn some new terms, and of course, you need to sit down and discuss dying. That's probably not something we daydream about.

But daydream about this! Think of the beautiful things your Christian estate plan can accomplish!

Which brings me to one final point! The Lutheran Home Association in Belle Plaine owes its beginnings to a Christian widow who left a Christian legacy. Sophie Boessling was the lady who gave her farm and the rest of her estate to build the first Lutheran Home. It was a modest building, but state of the art for its day. Over its history, it has served 1,000s of souls, some of them from this congregation. Today, all we have left of it the original building are some bricks and few pictures. In its place stands an organization that employs over 600 individuals and serves thousands of people, showing Christ's love by providing for the spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional needs of the people entrusted to our care and many more.

Sophie Boessling, our founder, was like Mary. She was devoted to Jesus and determined to leave this life with a gift to honor Jesus. In 117 years, it's a beautiful thing to see what the Lord has done with it. He can do a lot of beautiful things with your Christian legacy too. Just leave it to him. Amen.

Pastor Curt Seefeldt
Director of Church Relations
The Lutheran Home Association