

Something Remarkable Happens:
April 3, 2022, Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year C, John 12:1-8
Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day and always. Amen.

Good morning.

It's the Saturday before Jesus goes to Jerusalem where he is betrayed. Imagine you are transported to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus and put yourself into this story.

You come through the house door, and there's a room full of people. You are one of the guests. Among the crowd are Jesus's disciples and followers, mostly if not all of them men. You immediately see most are reclined around a low table. You know Martha has been cooking all weekend, bless her heart, and the entire house is filled with the delicious aroma of herbed fish, roasted vegetables, fresh baked spiced bread, and an assortment of fresh cheeses, and stewed figs.

Jesus is there with the disciples and other friends. You can hear Thomas's voice above the din. Thomas is retelling the story of Jesus's raising Lazarus from the dead. You hear him shout, "Unbind him!" Everyone is riveted to the story.

Immediately you sense that there is a lot going on in this place. This is a household where there is devotion and dissent, Sabbath rest and ministry, active service and relaxed fellowship, its a celebration of life! All of this in one house under one roof. The connection between this household and Jesus is love. There is no mention of Martha, Mary, or Lazarus being married or having children, and Jesus spends a lot of time at their house; they are his "family of choice." He has a special bond with them.

At some point, you see Mary. She is holding a beautifully decorated alabaster jar in her hands, and before anyone can wrap their minds around what exactly is happening, Mary has broken it open, and Jesus' feet are drenched with nard. The entire house now smells of sweet orange blossoms. She rubs the ointment in, and when his skin can't absorb any more, you see her removing the clip from her hair; she shakes her head, takes her hair in both her hands, and she wipes the excess oil from Jesus's feet. Mary looks up at him and says in a whispered voice,

"Please ... don't go to Jerusalem."

And Jesus says back to her, "I have to go, Mary."

And Mary says, "I know you do."

They have this moment together like no one's watching. Oh, but we are. WE are all watching this. When Mary lets down her hair in a room full of men, which by the way a respectable woman would

never do! An unmarried woman caressing the feet of Jesus, a Rabbi?
... We all GASP!

This is entirely inappropriate! We are ALL scandalized!

You look around the room and notice Judas Iscariot is in the house,
And. He. Loses it! This woman has just waltzed over and poured out
a stupid amount of precious substance on Jesus's feet. And for
what?

He stands there, arms crossed, tapping his foot, and finally says,

"Why wasn't this sold and the money given to the poor?"

Like, he cares about the poor. All Judas cares about is the common
purse, and the money in it, and how he can squirrel it away for
himself!

Jesus says to Judas, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she
might keep it for the day of my burial. You will always have the
poor with you, but you will not always have me."

Well, now... here we are.

What is God trying to tell us?

Could it be something about humility?

Could it be about extravagant love?

I ask myself, have I ever witnessed anyone humble themselves like this, make themselves so incredibly vulnerable?

What Mary does for Jesus is an incredibly intimate thing. She knows this is the end for Jesus. His death is just around the corner.

She is so overwhelmed by immense love and sadness for him that she throws caution to the wind and humbles herself. She does this incredibly intimate thing in front of everyone!

Mary had purchased this costly perfume for Jesus's burial - to anoint his head like a king but she is so moved by the realization that NOW is the time; and this is the place. She has to do this thing NOW!

All social norms, customs, and rules be damned!

So she humbles herself, gets down on her hands and knees and she anoints his feet.

Was this shocking for Jesus too?

And ... what is Jesus trying to tell us about the poor?

For the record, I believe that he is saying as long as there are poor people, they will be with us, and we, the ones who practice a "Better Way," will have their backs.

We do not need to neglect them to do for Jesus what Mary has done.

This is us, and this is the household of God.

You see, Jesus gave Mary a sense of hope. And that hope was either going to die with Jesus or live on. When Mary poured the costly perfume and anointed Jesus' feet, the common moment suddenly became extraordinary.

The same thing happens when you and I extend ourselves beyond the polite moment by pouring a unique word of love or affection on another. Unlike Mary, we tend to hold back, hesitate, and resist the very urge to move beyond our comfort zones of expressed affection. When we do extend ourselves, it will be remembered as Mary's anointing of Jesus's feet is remembered.

The good news is that we are loved by God beyond our wildest imaginations but we still hold back, afraid.

What is God calling you to break open?

In what ways are you holding back?

By holding back we just might miss the opportunities to pour out our precious love on another.

Scott Stoner, an Episcopal priest and creator of the Living Compass series, says that "Life is full of hurt and disappointment. That's the bad news.

The good news is that new life and new beginnings are always possible once we fully acknowledge and feel our hurt and then, gradually, let it go and move beyond it.”

My friends, That is the promise of our faith.

It is the ongoing process of death and resurrection that we live our entire lives.

When we can let go of hurt and disappointment, new life will often emerge in ways we could not have previously imagined.

Amen.