

Barre Congregational Church

April 3, 2022: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Fifth Sunday in Lent

“And she anointed His feet with oil”

Our sermons and previous worship services can be found on our website at

www.barrechurch.com

Scripture Reading: John 12 v 1-8

I. Introduction:

Have you ever broken a bottle of your special perfume? Have you ever lost or forgotten it somewhere? Oh, that feeling of losing something so special, is not easy, right? And if you do use perfume, then you probably tested different ones through the years, until you knew that that was your special perfume. Some of us have tried different ones, and maybe using more than one perfume depending on the occasion. At the office down in Hartford years ago, my colleagues would say, there she comes! The woman who wears Charlie, which is the perfume I've been using for many years! And so, yes, we are being recognized for the perfume we wear, and it can fill a room and the staircase as you walk up the stairs! So, here in our passage we are reading about a very special perfume or scented oil, used by Mary, to anoint Jesus' feet. And when she poured it over His feet, it filled the whole room! Let's have a look...

II. The expensive perfume on Jesus' feet!

In this passage we see Jesus arriving in Bethany, the place where Lazarus, Mary and Martha were living. He had traveled from a small village, called Ephraim, where he withdrew with His disciples after He was threatened by the Chief Priests and the Pharisees, who plotted to kill Him. It was six days before the Sabbath when He arrived in Bethany. Bethany is the place where Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus, so it is viewed as a place of miracle, and it was also Lazarus' home. It was not far from Jerusalem, where soon Jesus would be traveling to and where He would predict His death.

One can imagine Lazarus and his sisters being very excited at Jesus' visit, and grateful for what He had done for Lazarus, so they prepared a special dinner for Him. They were gathered in this

intimate setting with their Lord. We then see Mary opening a container with the most expensive perfume, or scented oil, the highest quality perfume only possessed by the wealthy. It was about 12 ounces of oil, that is, one Roman pound. The Greek word used for pure is called *pistikês*, meaning pure and unadulterated in nature, says Edward W. Klink and Clinton E. Arnold in the Zondervan Commentary on John. Mary poured this very expensive oil over Jesus' feet! This was an incredible act by Mary since no one would do that to a single person. Such oil was only used for special occasions of celebration, and usually the oil was poured on the head of a person, not their feet. But then again, we understand that this was indeed a very special occasion where this family was extremely grateful to Jesus for what he had done. So, while He was pursued by the leaders at the time to get rid of Him, here in this house He is treated like the King that He was!

Mary's act is an act of humility as she kneeled and poured the oil over His feet, an act that was only performed by the servants of a household. We see later in John Jesus washing the feet of His disciples, an act of humble servanthood, a way of life His disciples would have to follow and live by. Mary bent down further and use her hair like a cloth to wipe the oil from His feet. What Mary was doing here, was completely unacceptable for a woman to do during that time. She does something countercultural, and she treated Him like royalty! Now we know what our perfume can do to a room, or a staircase, right? We do not even use a whole bottle of perfume at once, and here we see 12 ounces of scented perfume is used at once, and the house was filled with this fragrance. This was a moment of royalty! The King of Kings was anointed by this woman, the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. What an acknowledgment, during a time when Jesus was on the road to being crucified by those who felt threatened by Him.

III. The poor is always with you, Jesus said.

Before Jesus would get to Jerusalem, His own disciple, Judas Iscariot, who would betray Him later, objected to the use of this expensive oil to be used like this, when if it were to be sold, the money would be the equivalent of one year's wages. A laborer during that time was paid one denarius a day, and this bottle of perfume could be sold for 300 denarii, almost a full year's wages. What about the poor, he asked? Judas, who was the treasurer of

the group of disciples had a point there, except for the fact that he wasn't really concerned about the poor, but as John comments in verse 6, he took some of the money from the treasurer's purse for himself.

Jesus defends the action of Mary, and tells Judas to leave her alone, because the poor will always be with them, while Jesus Himself will not always be with them, referring to His imminent death. For Judas the perfume represented money, but for Mary it was the worthiest substance to anoint Jesus, says Arnold and Klink.

IV. Conclusion

The perfume we use we do not often share with others unless they really like the aroma and want to try it out on themselves. If we were to receive a special guest or guests, whom we had not seen in a while, or whom we deem special, whoever they are, we would go out of our way to make the special preparations for their visit. We may not pour our special scented oils over their heads or feet, but we would get the house ready, and special food and treats. At the same time, we also care for those who need our help in different ways.

As we witness Mary's act of kindness and gratefulness and humility, and we see Jesus' response to Judas Iscariot, we are reminded during this period of Lent of His journey to the cross, of His stop at Bethany before He would enter Jerusalem and approach the end of His life. He is the essence of the life of the disciples, of the church, and now He is wrestling with what will happen to Him. While he cares for the poor, the poor is secondary to who He is. He is the King, the Messiah, the One whom we worship and pray to. He is worth more than the concern over money and the economy. He overcomes the threat of those who would kill Him, because He already resurrected Lazarus from the dead, and He will be raised on the third day of His death. Mary was doing the right thing, and Judas needs to learn a lesson or two about humility and generosity and gratitude and more, the acknowledgement of the One who had been with them, the One he would betray. It is sad to know that Judas would not get the message of Christ then. But we do, and we remember Him today and tomorrow and in our lives. May God bless this message to our lives as we approach Palm Sunday with praise in our hearts for the One whom God blessed us with. Amen