

Midweek 3

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

Text: Mark 14:1-9

Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ,

St. Mark wrote in his gospel, "While he was in Bethany..." St. John added in his parallel account, "Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor." In attendance at the home of Simon, the Leper, were Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Jesus, and his apostles. The Holy Spirit invites us through God's Word to join them. John also identified the woman who "came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard," as Mary.

It was Saturday evening, the night before the Sunday we know as Palm Sunday. Mary had acquired a gift for Jesus. She presented him her offering in an anointing. Mary's offering brought a response from those present. Jesus knew the reason for Mary's sacrifice- a fruit of faith.

I Tell You the Truth . . . Fruits of Faith Will Be Remembered. We look first at the preparation and presentation of the offering. Then, we see the response to and reason for the offering.

Mary prepared her gift for one guest at the dinner special to her. Jesus had defended her in front of her sister, Martha, and had encouraged her spiritual growth: "Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." [Lk 10:42] Jesus had felt her pain and wept with her over her brother Lazarus' death. Jesus had called her brother back from death and from the grave

Without hesitation, Mary had purchased an alabaster jar of pure nard, an expensive perfume. She did not buy it to make herself smell good for Jesus. She did not give it to her Lord because he needed it, at least not yet! She prepared it to present to Jesus in an anointing. St. Mark wrote, "She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head."

It was all for Jesus, reclining there at the table. Mary poured every drop on her Savior. John adds, "She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair." This was quite a presentation. Mary gave Jesus a precious and most personal expression of her faith in and love for her Savior. We have been reminding ourselves in our Sunday sermons that those are the characteristics of fruits of faith that will be remembered; precious and personal sacrifices we offer in faith and love.

Jesus commended Mary's preparation and presentation of the offering. "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."

In an instant, the fragrance of nard overcame the mouthwatering aromas of the meal. Jesus, as he said, considered Mary's action a beautiful and memorable thing. Jesus' response was acceptance of her love and her love offering. However, that is not how all responded.

"Some of those present" objected to one another and "rebuked her harshly." They responded negatively that it had been a waste. More than a year's wages was a sizeable amount. They were concerned that the money could have been given to the poor. Fair enough. Yet Jesus told them to leave Mary alone. He gave them a lesson. There would be plenty more opportunities to be generous and charitable to the needy because "The poor you will always have with you."

John's parallel account mentions Judas in particular as voicing his objections. The apostle added that Judas' objection was not because of his concern for the poor. Judas objected because he was a thief who regularly had his hand in the disciples' moneybag.

What is our response? How do we view Mary's action? We can use our own circumstance. All the money we are spending on a building, couldn't we have taken all that money and given it to the poor? Or, all the money we send to WELS for our congregational mission offering to train pastors and teachers, send out missionaries, and do other shared ministry work could be used right here to do ministry.

Whatever form my sacrifice to the Lord and his work takes is pleasing to God. Some may object that we could have used it in other areas. That may be true. Or, it may be the argument of a selfish and greedy heart.

What does Jesus say in response to such offerings? The Lord calls our gifts, as big or as small as they are, "a beautiful thing to me." The Lord said of Mary, "She did what she could. . . . 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." As we talk about Mary tonight, Jesus' words are fulfilled once again.

I tell you the truth...fruits of faith will be remembered. In the end, it comes down to the reason for Mary's

offering. Love was the reason Mary prepared and presented the perfume. Those who objected did not get that Mary loved Jesus more than anything. Jesus did get it. Jesus knew Mary's heart. Her love was a beautiful thing because it flowed from her faith in him.

Mary's anointing Jesus' body with expensive perfume served another purpose even she did not know at the time. Remember, I mentioned Jesus did not need the spice yet? He would need the spices the women would use to anoint his dead body in the tomb. Jesus told them that in effect Mary had previewed his death. "But you will not always have me...She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial."

God the Father broke much more than an alabaster jar full of perfume. He poured out completely his only Son. When he did that, the fragrance of "Father, forgive them" filled the world. From Jesus' first soft cry in the manger to the last agonizing cry on the cross, God was saying a beautiful thing. "I am determined to save the world, no matter the cost. I am determined to save you, no matter the cost. *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."*

When the Holy Spirit leads us to fathom and appreciate the cost of God's love for us, something miraculous happens. Like Mary, we love without calculating the cost because he first loved us. We will break our own alabaster jars, being more generous, more compassionate, more Christ-centered, and more eager to honor the One who loved us.

I tell you the truth...fruits of faith will be remembered. Why? Because our Savior loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God on the cross. That is why when we survey his wondrous cross, we sing,

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen. (CW 125:4) <SDG>