

Full to the Brim – Brazen Acts of Beauty

John 12: 1-8

Don Lincoln

Music director Bob Morris frequently reminds the choir – **NO fragrances!!** Some in the choir can't handle being ambushed by **Ambush**. Or having their respiratory tract trampled by **MUSK**. Or being channeled into breathlessness by Chanel No. 5. There's now a popular fragrance called "Flowerbomb." Do NOT wear it in choir, where deep breathing is essential!

I know these things, because I'm one of those people whose throat actually starts to close up at most strong fragrances and perfumes. Ask my wife.

Some of you know my Sunday morning routine. I arrive before 6:00am – in the pulpit by 6:30am with manuscript and red pen in hand – turn on the sound system – preach to an empty sanctuary – revise, edit with my red pen – and often do that twice. I've done so since my candidating sermon 22 years ago.

My first Easter at Westminster, I arrived at 0-dark-hundred – reviewed my manuscript, printed it, and walked through the sanctuary doors, only to find myself assaulted by a pungent aroma. I was horrified to see what looked like ten thousand lilies – most of them stacked around the pulpit.

Thankfully, just then the long-time associate pastor and a few volunteers arrived early to handle the sunrise service, and I told them the lilies had to go. They freaked! "We can't do that!" And I said, "Unless you want to do CPR during the sermon, they have to move." They were moved.

Our text today takes place in the home of Lazarus – who Jesus raised from the dead a week earlier. Lazarus is hosting a dinner for Jesus – his new BFF – talk about a best friend forever – anyway, Lazarus has Jesus to dinner in his home, along with his sisters Mary and Martha. And like that Easter morning sanctuary – the house is FILLED with the fragrance of perfume.

But it's not the aroma that assaults the senses of those present there. For Judas – it's the value of a pound of perfume worth nearly a year's wages. As treasurer of Jesus, Inc., Judas is flabbergasted, and says so.

I'm guessing others might not have been put off by the smell, but **WERE** surely uncomfortable with Mary's behavior. Who wouldn't be. Not exactly dinner activity. Mary not only anoints Jesus' feet with expensive perfume but in a most intimate gesture caresses the fragrant oil on Jesus' feet with her hair.

To anoint Jesus' head would've been a symbol of royalty; but to perfume His feet in **this way** was outright adoration. Our friends at Sanctified Art wrote this:

"Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet is a public act of worship – worship in its purest sense. Mary's act is risky—she puts her full body into it. Her faith does not hide; it is not frugal. It is embodied, broken open, and poured out. This isn't a stingy faith—it is an abundant, extravagant faith."¹

Why this overflowing worship? Mary hasn't misunderstood Jesus' title or misread his resume. She knows **exactly who Jesus is**, and the love and devotion He is due. After all, her brother Lazarus had been dead and Jesus has brought him to life.

She has heard Jesus speak about the clouds on the horizon. She knows that this One who gave her brother life also speaks of His sacrifice to come. She may be the only disciple who truly perceives the gathering storm.

So she knows this Jesus deserves an act of extravagant holiness. So a brazen act of beauty – worship it is; dinner party be damned. She pours out the fragrance, and spreads it with her hair. It is a moment of decadent blessing, a sacred act probably neither planned nor managed.

Mary never would've made a good Presbyterian.

As my friend John Buchanan once said, "In my upbringing, public display of emotion was seriously frowned upon. Our religion was Presbyterian, which meant it was unemotional, controlled, reasonable, and certainly not spontaneous.

Other people might shout and weep and stand up and wave their hands around and sing fervently in worship, but we Presbyterians preferred our religion sitting down with a bulletin in our hands to tell us how to express ourselves. "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" was about as enthusiastic as we ever got."²

Thanks be to God, that's not the way of Jesus. In Him, the extravagance of God's love is made flesh. He will not hide away or save His precious substance. His bottle will not be held back to be kept and admired. It will be opened, offered and used, at great price. It will be raised up and poured out for the life of the world, emptied to the last drop.⁵ And the aroma of His love will fill the world for all eternity.

So Mary does a good thing. In worshipping Jesus in this way, Mary models the very love of Jesus, poured out with abandon. I am sure it won't be the last time.

From today's gathering thought in the email or on your bulletin cover:

Be sloppy with compassion.
Don't measure it out, ounce by ounce.
Don't hunt in cupboards,
looking for the right size container before you pour.
If it spills over, it's okay.
You'll be surprised how easily it cleans up.

So it should be with our worship. After all, it's the way we tell God we love Him.

May it be so.

1. Debie Thomas, www.journeywithjesus.net, March 27, 2022
2. John Buchanan, "*Holy Waste*", Fourth Presbyterian Church, March 14, 2010.