

John 12:1-8  
April 3, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lazarus was dead to begin with. Lazarus was dead, but now he is alive and sharing a meal with his sisters and his dear friend Jesus.

Lazarus was dead, which means that his sisters likely had some nard leftover from when they prepared his body for burial. You'll remember that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days and smelled horrible when Jesus arrived. The sisters even told Jesus not to open the tomb, because the smell would be so bad, but instead Jesus has the stone rolled away and he calls Lazarus to come out, which he does, still bandaged from being dead.

And now, a week later, Mary is using that same nard on Jesus' feet, connecting Lazarus' death to Jesus' crucifixion, but it doesn't end there. Mary uses her hair to wipe the nard off of Jesus' feet, and if you have ever used Vicks Vapo-rub, you know how that smell is powerful, sticky, and lingers. Can you imagine having a pound of it in your hair?

This all occurs one week before Jesus is to be crucified, so you can imagine that both Jesus and Mary smell like nard as he is crucified on the cross, and perhaps even Lazarus is also still carrying that smell. The one who was dead, the one who is going to die, and the one who is alive all smell the same. They all smell like nard, which is a sweet pleasant smell, which hopefully you can smell right now, but it was also a smell that was often mixed with the smell of death.

In Nebraska, and Wyoming for that matter, the funeral homes all smelled the same. It was a sweet powdery smell. I haven't smelled it here lately, perhaps because they do not prepare the bodies in the funeral homes here anymore.

But there is this smell in many funeral homes. You know it when you smell it. It's the smell of sweetness tied with death. Life and death, death and life, mingled up together in one smell.

At the meal that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are sharing together with Jesus and his disciples, there is a similar kind of smell in the air. The smell of nard.

Lazarus smells of it. Jesus smells of it. And Mary smells of it. And everyone within 100 yards of their home likely smells the sweet perfume, and maybe those outside of the house are wondering who died.

And like Chris Rock being smacked at the Oscars, something even stranger happens at the supper. In the midst of this weird interaction between Jesus and Mary, which some find intimate and some find really strange, the only thing Judas can think about is money. Money, money, money. Money that he wants to steal. Money that he wants for himself. Money that he can't take, because the nard is now on Jesus' feet and there is no getting it back.

The whole reason there will always be poor people among us is because of people like Judas who for whatever reason want all the money they can get ahold of. The fact is that there will never be enough money for Judas and so he actually has no problem taking it from the poor. All the poor people would scoff at Judas if they heard him, because they knew he didn't care about them in the least.

But Mary is that total opposite of Judas. Instead of taking what isn't hers, she gives what she has. Because Lazarus was dead to begin with, she had nard leftover from preparing his body, and so she uses that nard on Jesus' feet. Jesus says she does it because she is preparing him for burial, but did she know what she was doing? Probably, because she was the only one actually listening to Jesus.

You'll recall that Mary would sit at Jesus feet and listen to him much to the irritation of her sister Martha. So, Mary was likely sharing the nard with Jesus as a gift of thanks for the many hours she had spent learning at his feet and perhaps she wanted to carry that remembrance with her in her own hair - so close to her ears where she heard the good news of death and resurrection, so close to her eyes where she saw her brother raised from the dead, so close to her mouth where she can speak the good news, and so close to her nose where she can smell the nard.

There is a Jewish saying – may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi. Hinting that you should follow so close behind your rabbi that as he walks you are in his dust cloud. Here Mary is covered in the nard of her rabbi.

Mary is a very special disciple. She is the real disciple as opposed to Judas who is just in it for the money. Mary has been transformed by Jesus, but Judas has not. Mary is selfless and Judas is selfish.

Mary uses her assets, her nard and her hair, for Jesus and it benefits not only him, but her and everyone who is around to smell the pleasing aroma. She gives the nard she has laying around after Lazarus' death, and she gives it to Jesus. Jesus takes her gift that is offered to him and he blesses it. It was what she had and she gave it freely to him.

During Lent, we remember that we are not God. We remember the First Commandment – God is God and we are not. When we give to Jesus, to God, we proclaim that we are not God by proclaiming that all we have is actually God's, the Creator's, in the first place. God created it and it is God's.

When we use our assets, the things we have, to honor God, we are blessed. Blessed means to be in relationship with God. That is the blessing we celebrate.

Judas was a thief. He regularly broke the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment, with Jesus standing right there. He constantly took money from the common purse, which he was in charge of. He may not be the first embezzler listed in the Bible, but he is probably the most well-known.

Any time we break any of Commandments 2-10, we automatically break number 1, because we are putting ourselves over and above God.

We don't steal, because whatever it is it's not ours. If God gives someone an asset, through work or gift, it is that persons to steward, not ours. We have no control over it.

Everything belongs to God, we are just stewards of the assets we have been gifted. And since everything belongs to God when we take other people's assets, we sin against God, and our neighbor.

Mary, unlike Judas, gives what she has to God. That's good. Judas, however, wants to take everything he can get ahold of. That's bad. He even hands Jesus over to the authorities to be crucified. That's really bad. Now he's even embezzling life.

Mary is selfless. So selfless that she uses her own hair to care for Jesus' feet. Her hair is her ultimate asset b/c it's growing right on her own head. It belongs to no one else at all.

Judas is selfish – totally selfish – so selfish that he even tries to pull the poor into his dastardly schemes. If I were a poor person and knew what Judas was up to, I would have said, “You leave me out of this! Don’t you dare use me as an excuse for your thievery.”

Judas is a thief. He steals money. He uses people for his selfish gain.

Mary is generous and gives what she has to Jesus, and she is blessed because of it.

When we look at what we have as already being God’s, not our own, we are blessed, because that’s when we join in Jesus’ ministry of sharing with those who can use it. When we share the assets we’ve been given to steward with those in need, we are walking nardy – in the nard of our rabbi who destroys death and brings new life. That’s when we talk his talk and walk his walk.

If someone is hungry, we give what we have to that person to eat or to buy something to eat. If someone is cold, we give them our jacket or money to buy one. If someone is lonely, we spend our time with them. If someone needs a ride, we give them a ride or hook them up with an Uber or bus pass. If someone has dry skin, we give them the lotion we have or go buy some for them. If someone needs to wash their hair, we give them the shampoo we have or go to the store and get some for them. If someone needs margarine, we share what we have with them or go to the store and buy some for them.

We give what we have, not what someone else has. And, we also don’t critique how other people steward their gifts. That is not ours to control.

It’s funny how control and selfishness run hand in hand. When we give, we lose control over whatever it is we have given. We give it back to God and let the Spirit take care of it. That’s living in the first commandment. God is God and we are not. We are simply God’s servants in the world. We are Jesus’ hands, feet, and voice here and now.

Mary had a very close relationship with Jesus. She gave out of pure love for him, and because of that she shared in his death and resurrection as her gift of love was on Jesus feet and in her hair.

May we be like Mary, stinking of love as we steward the gifts God has given to us.

When we do that, not only are we blessed, but the whole community is as well.

Thanks be to God. Amen.