



the Source

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me...

I can't stand the smell of hairspray. My sense of smell isn't terribly keen, but there's just something about hairspray that gets me, so that if my wife uses it in the next room, I just move to the other side of the house. For me, the scent is unavoidable. So the imagery in this week's story is very vivid. "Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." I can easily picture fumes filling up my nose, only presumably it doesn't smell like melted plastic. No, for the amount of money Mary must have spent on this perfume, and for it to be a full pound of perfume, it must smell like unicorns and rainbows. And it's an unavoidable smell that permeates the whole house. The extravagance of this gift is in the face of everyone eating dinner. As Mary wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, it's clear that she loves Jesus. It's also clear that at least one person present is incredibly uncomfortable with this outpouring of devotion shown to her Lord.

But it's not Jesus who is uncomfortable. Instead, he affirms her exuberance. Mary was one who had placed her faith in Jesus, saying, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." And after she said that, Jesus raised her brother Lazarus from the dead. **From the dead!** From zombie Lazarus emerging from the tomb at Jesus' command, Lazarus now sat at the table dining with everyone, alive as can be. This is what Mary witnessed with her own two eyes! How could she not respond in love and amazement? How could she not give with such abundance beyond anything that seemed reasonable, as she had experienced things beyond reason to her? Who is Judas to see this joyous outpouring of love for Jesus, and try to restrain it?

— Robin Levins, *First Church member*

A Family Affair

As a family, talk about the best gift you have ever received. You may have received it this past year at Christmas or some other time. Share the best gift you have ever given. Why that was gift your favorite? Now read John 12:1-8 together as a family.

This Scripture tells us about a very nice gift that Mary gave to Jesus. She dumped a bottle of very expensive perfume on his feet and then wiped them with her hair! Today, it may seem strange to us to think of this gesture as a gift, but in Jesus' time, it was very generous. Think about living in Jesus', time when people either walked barefoot or wore sandals. People's feet were often extremely dirty and stinky. This gift that Mary gave demonstrated to Jesus that he was very important to her. She was a faithful follower who acted in great love. Even though she was criticized for her gift, Jesus defended her.

Jesus is no longer a human, living on earth, but can we still show our love for him? Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another, as he loved them. Brainstorm ways you can show you love for one another, both those you know, and maybe some people you don't know.

Dear God, thank you for the many examples of love in your Word. Help us to show that love to those we meet each day, even those who can be a challenge to love. Amen.

— Jennifer Hall, *Director of Children's Ministry*

Consider the Source John 12:1 - 8

Monday: John 12:1-2

This week's story begins by mentioning two other events. The author is very deliberate with chronological details. These other events anchor the story. The anointing here is associated with Jesus' impending death, and the referenced events are likewise associated with death in some way.

- *The Passover is a Jewish festival commemorating the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. The Jewish people were spared the death of their first-born children by marking their doorways with the blood of a lamb without blemish. Why do you think John makes this connection here?*
- *The resurrection of Lazarus is also mentioned here, and Lazarus himself is present at the dinner. Why do you think John highlights Lazarus here?*

Tuesday: John 11:1-44

Take some time today to read the story of of Lazarus. There are seven clearly articulated "signs" in John, which point to the divinity of Jesus, and this one is the seventh. Our text this week makes it clear that the anointing story in Chapter 12 is linked to the resurrection story told in Chapter 11.

- *What scent is mentioned in the Lazarus story, and how does it contrast with the anointing?*
- *In light of what Mary witnessed, how reasonable is her extravagant gift?*

Wednesday: John 11:45-57

The author's placement of stories is very calculated. While the resurrection of Lazarus and the anointing of Jesus by Mary are clearly linked, John "sandwiches" another story between them. The reaction of the authorities to the seventh sign of John stands in stark contrast to Mary's loving response.

- *What do the Pharisees call for in response to Jesus giving life to another?*
- *What is the dual meaning behind verses 49-50? These verses also set the tone of Jerusalem for Jesus' arrival. What risks are there for those around him?*

Thursday: John 19:38-42

Jesus would once again be anointed, but this time after his death. It seems only now are these two followers bold enough to come forth and support Jesus, but they do so in extravagant overabundance. Much like Mary, they are moved by love to act and show honor to Jesus.

- *What risks did Mary take, as did Joseph and Nicodemus, when anointing Jesus? Who do you think is taking the biggest risk when they act?*
- *A hundred pounds of myrrh and aloe is a stupidly large amount of spices. Does this seem as though they may have some regret for not having honored Jesus sooner, as Mary had?*
- *With this retrospective, how hollow does Judas' rebuke to Mary sound?*

Friday: John 12:3-8

Often, people have taken Jesus' response of "You will always have the poor with you" and used it to justify inaction on matters of social or economic inequality. This seems to go far beyond what Jesus says here. Judas attempts to paint this as an either/or scenario...you can help the poor or honor Jesus, but not both. Jesus answer, however, is to deny the either/or situation entirely. What does Jesus center the discussion on?

- *Judas is described here as having "kept the common purse" and would "steal what was put into it". With his hand in the cookie jar, how much progress do you think Judas made towards eliminating poverty?*
- *What other indications do we have from the Bible that "You will always have the poor with you" isn't an aspirational goal?*