

Sermon for March 17, 2013 Fifth Sunday in Lent

John 12:1-8

Blessings to you and peace from God the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ  
and the Holy Spirit. Amen

When I was young **every** Saturday morning my **dad, me**, and our collie, **Sandy**, would climb into our **silver** Chevrolet station wagon and go over to my grandparent's house. **And** every Saturday my grandmother would have a pot of **Swedish egg** coffee ready on the stove, a **cup** sitting on the table waiting for my dad, and some sort of **freshly baked** sweet treat for us—you know how they do in the Midwest—**every time** you went to visit family or friends there was **always** food to be had. The smell was **heavenly**. Even though I do **not** drink coffee now, **back then**, I would have some **coffee with my milk**— $\frac{3}{4}$  milk and  $\frac{1}{4}$  coffee if you please. To this day **every time** I smell coffee I think of those Saturday mornings spent at my grandparent's house. **An act of love given and shown**, great memories, and SMELLS a way to **reconnect** with a time gone by.

How about you? Are there some smells that remind **you of days gone by** or of **people** you care about **or** have cared about? Possibly a whiff of a **flower's** aroma, or a smell of a **favorite cologne** that a loved one used to wear, or the **smell** of the ocean, or maybe a **not so great smell** of a skunk or trash. Any **number** of

smells can bring us **right back** to a **person**, a **place**, or a **time** in our lives. It is written that, “Smells are **surer** than sights or sounds to **tug** at our heartstrings.” So there we have it—our **sense of smell** relates **closely** to how we **experience** life and how we **process** significant memories.

**Smells**—this is what we are going to be focusing on this morning—some **good** smells and some **not so good** smells. One question I would like you to be thinking about also—**Does an act of grace or love shown have a scent or smell to it?** Our gospel lesson for this morning invites us to think about how we can relate to what is going on in this passage which is **beyond words, beyond speaking**, and **beyond reading** as Jesus comes **even closer** to Jerusalem and death. Today John shows us **contrasting images** of stewardship and discipleship which are in **stark opposition** to each other—we have Judas and we have Mary.

Our story places us **six** days before the Passover, at **Bethany** which is approximately **2 miles** from Jerusalem, at **Lazarus’** house where Jesus had performed a miracle—the place where, **according** to the Bible, approximately **one** month ago **reeked** with the stench of **death** as in chapter 11 of John’s gospel we read the story of Jesus **raising** Lazarus from the dead. We read the verse which says, “‘But **Lord,**’ said Martha, the **sister** of the dead man, ‘by **this** time there is a **bad odor**, for he has been there **four** days.’” The odor of death **truly** had recently filled this house.

Now Jesus had come **back** to Bethany knowing **full well** that the chief priests and Pharisees had called a **meeting** of the Sanhedrin—the group who had the **supreme** religious authority in the land. He **knew** that they were plotting to **kill** Him as they had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, they were to report it to them so that he might be **arrested**. Because by raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus has gone from the category of “**manageable nuisance**” to being a “**serious threat**” to the Jewish leaders. Jesus **knew** his days were numbered. This is the **back-story** for our reading today.

This night a **dinner** had been given in Jesus’ honor. Could you **imagine** what kind of conversation that could have **possibly** gone on between Jesus and Lazarus as they **reclined** at the table that night—when the one who was **covered** with the stench of death, **4 days** in the tomb, was no longer dead?

We do not know **who all** was at the table that night. Judas was the **only** disciple who was mentioned in **John’s** gospel story. Since **Martha** was serving the dinner and there was **no** indication that they were **wealthy** people; how do you suppose that Mary could have **afforded** a pound of such **costly** perfume? In **today’s** currency this perfume would have been worth **more than** \$17,000. It was a perfume which would have been obtained as a **luxury** in ancient Egypt, the **Near East**, and in **Rome**. It was used as one of the **eleven herbs** for the incense in the **temple** in Jerusalem.

This is where the **real** contrast in the gospel lesson comes. We have **Judas**, the **unfaithful** disciple, who was filled with his own **self serving** ways, **hypocrisy**, **greed**, and **sinfulness**. Then we have Mary who was a loving **faithful** disciple, **devoting** herself and **all** that she had to Jesus, the one who **sat** at Jesus' feet and **listened** to him, as well as the one who offered Jesus the gift of a **precious possession**. **Does an act of grace or love shown have a scent or smell to it?**

**Judas**, the one who held the **common** purse, the one who used to **steal** from that purse, did have a point in his **objection** about Mary anointing Jesus with this **costly** perfume because **90%** of the population of that time were people who **lacked** any worldly goods and who were considered the **poorest** of the poor. As I said earlier this perfume would have been worth **more than** \$17,000 in today's currency. That is **no** small amount. But Judas **did not care** about the poor—he was looking to line his **own** pockets. The odor of **greed and sinfulness** surrounded him.

In **contrast** there was Mary who fell to Jesus' feet as if she knew **something** that the **other** people did not—a knowing beyond words. She wanted to do something **special** for Jesus. **Jesus**, the man who **restored** her beloved brother **back** to life. **Jesus**, the one she loved. She offered him this **lavish gift** without consideration of cost. Who can put a **price** on the **life** of a loved one who has been returned to you?

Mary does **4 remarkable things** which a respectable woman in that culture would **never** have done. 1. She **loosened** her hair in a room **full of men**. 2. She poured perfume on Jesus' **feet not** on his head. (Note: At that time the **only** man who would have gotten his feet anointed was a **dead** man—and Jesus **knew it**.) 3. She **rubbed** his feet-unheard of for a **single** woman to wipe a **single** man's feet. 4. She **wiped** the perfume off with her hair.//////The smell of perfume, grace, and love permeated the air. Mary's actions toward Jesus **spoke so much louder** than any **words** could have. **Does an act of grace or love shown have a scent or a smell to it?**

The house was filled with the **sweet smell** of the fragrance. Through Mary's action, the **stench** and the **odor** of death that was once **slow** in leaving their household had been **replaced** by the scent of **grace and love** offered toward Jesus—a **beloved friend** of the family. This was a **sweet moment of stillness** amid a **gathering** storm. Mary's **act** of anointing was a **foreshadowing** of the time when she would keep **any perfume** she had left for the day of Jesus' burial. This gift of anointing **brought to light** the approaching arrival of Jesus' **final** hour. The **significance** of the act was that it revealed the **truth** of what was to come—a **final** anointing.

Mary's act of grace and love most **certainly** had a scent and a smell to it. **Gracefully** giving this anointing to Jesus at this time in his **journey** toward the

cross gives us a **foretaste** of the grace and love of **God's** gift of His **one and only** son which will **play out** before us during **Holy Week** throughout Jesus' upcoming **arrest, crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection.**

I am **not sure** what it means **exactly** for you and me to **love Jesus** as Mary did for we **do not physically** have him here with us to anoint, but we **can do** something **precious** for him. For **us, like Mary**, Jesus looks **beyond** the outward acts and **sees into our hearts.** He helps us see **not only** life's surfaces but also to be able to **look** at the events **unfolding** around us to **perceive** what is **truly** happening. In our lives we may **never know** what differences we have made or **who** we may have influenced because **God** takes a **word** spoken, a **gift** given, a **hand** extended, an **effort** made, and gives it a **life and a power** far beyond what we could have **ever intended** the act to portray. **Does an act of grace or love shown have a scent or a smell to it?** On Saturday for those who worked on the **Habitat for Humanity** project grace and love smelled like **paint, sweat, and donuts** which were graciously provided for us by Randi the homeowner.

God in all of His **grace and love** works **in us, with us,** and **through us** far beyond **anything** we could ever expect. In a **deeper** way, Mary's **anointing** that night made the house at Bethany a **holy place** where the **sweet smell** of perfume went beyond words **paving the way** for Jesus' own **continuing** journey of

**extraordinary** grace and love for us—**all** the way to the cross. Thanks be to God.

**AMEN**