

Sermon for March 9th, 2014

First Sunday in Lent, Mark 14:1-9

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Here we are in the **first** Sunday of the **season** of Lent. These **40 days** are a time for us to face together the brokenness of our lives and the world, and then **turn** that brokenness over to Christ so that we can be **restored by him** through His death and resurrection.

If you happened to be here at worship on Ash Wednesday you would have heard me mention that during Lent I am going to be preaching a **worship series** called, '*Restored in Christ*'. Each week we will be learning how our sinfulness and brokenness has been **restored** by the One who was without sin. Jesus, the **holy One**, who came to die for us. This week's topic is '*broken vessel restored*'.

In our **Old** Testament readings for this morning we heard about **anointing** for the purpose of uplifting and being made holy. In the verses just before our first reading from Exodus the Lord had told Moses to take liquid myrrh, fragrant cinnamon, fragrant cane, cassia, and olive oil and make them into a **sacred** oil to anoint the **Tent** of Meeting, the **ark** of Testimony, all of the **altars**, the **lampstands**, and any of the **utensils** that would be used during worship so they would be holy and whoever or whatever touched them would be holy as well.

Then Moses was instructed to **anoint** his brother, Aaron, and Aaron's sons so they could serve the Lord as His **priests**.

In our second reading the Lord told Samuel to fill his horn with oil, to **go** to Bethlehem, and to **anoint** one of Jesse's sons who would be king. The Lord said to Samuel, "*The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" When Jesse's youngest son, **David**, came before Samuel the Lord told Samuel to **rise and anoint** David as he was the one who was to be king.

Aaron and his sons were chosen by God to serve him as priests—yet they were **human—broken and flawed vessels**. They were great priests but Aaron is the one who, while Moses was away on the mountain, allowed the people of Israel to melt down their gold and fashion the melted gold into the image of a **golden calf** and **worship it** in place of God.

David, the great king and warrior that he was, was **also a broken and flawed** vessel. David had fallen in love with Bathsheba, the **wife** of another man, **Uriah**. David wanted Uriah dead so he could be with Bathsheba. David sent a letter to the leader of the army saying, '*Put Uriah in the front lines where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.*'

Humans—broken and flawed vessels are we. **Yet**, even in their humanness God brought **blessing** upon Aaron and his sons. David became the **greatest** king Israel had ever known and the one from whom **Jesus** descended.

In our gospel reading we heard about an anointing of another kind. It is **2** days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The **chief** priests and **scribes** were looking for a way to arrest Jesus and kill him. Directly **after** our reading in Mark's gospel **Judas** went to the chief priests and **betrayed** Jesus.

More flawed and broken vessels to be sure.

Our **gospel** text continues by telling us that Jesus was keeping questionable company in Bethany at the home of **Simon** the leper. He was at the home of someone who—according to **Jewish law**—would have been an outcast, ritually unclean, and someone to stay away from. An **unnamed** woman comes into the story—she appears out of nowhere with her alabaster jar of **very costly** ointment. The ointment is **so costly** in fact that it would take one year's wages to purchase what that jar contained. With today's average yearly income for us in the United States the ointment would have been worth over \$50,000. Here she was **breaking open this jar of costly nard**-an ointment used for **calming** and used for **preparing bodies for burial**.

In what we **might suppose** was an act of **graceful touch, selflessness, and love** she poured the ointment on Jesus' head.

Can you **just imagine** the gasps and shouts of anger toward her? *‘Are you crazy? Why was this wasted like this? Why are we not selling this ointment and giving the money to the poor? What are you doing woman—what are you thinking?’* But for Jesus, the One who will be walking this lonesome journey to the cross, **this was not a waste**. Another bible version says that **Jesus’ response** to her **loving act** was, *‘Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.’* This beautiful, compassionate act meant something to Jesus. This beautiful, compassionate act was done with an **abundant heart**. *“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

To the **practical** mind, beauty in and of itself is **not** useful. For the **economist**, beauty does not balance the numbers. For the **activist**, beauty does not advance the cause. For the **strategist**, beauty does not give the upper hand. But for **Jesus**, without addressing this unnamed woman directly in the text, he **affirms** her presence, he **affirms** her gift, and he **affirms** her actions in terms of **who** she is, **what** she does, and **what the additional blessing** will be.

This woman has done what she could for Jesus. As a woman she had no seat of power, she was an unnamed person who came with a **spirit of compassion** to simply do what she could. She **began** where she was; she **offered** what she had to give. I would **imagine** this woman, like all the rest of us, was a broken and flawed

vessel herself. But what **sets her apart** from all the others in this passage is what **Jesus** says of her, *‘Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.’* This is a powerful testimony from our Lord and Savior about one such as her—a woman who **came with a gift**; did **what she could**; with an **abundant heart**.

Broken and flawed vessels one and all. I have a story for you which you **may or may not** have heard. I got it from my friend Pastor Sandy, *‘An elderly woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walks from the stream to the house the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was so proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it **spoke** to the woman one day by the stream. “I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house.” The old woman smiled, “Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but none on the other pot’s side? That’s because I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and*

every day while we walk back, you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house.” Each of us has our **own unique flaws**. But it’s the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives so interesting and rewarding.

*Each of us has gifts, experience, and we are **indeed** cracked and flawed. But **God is calling us to leak those gifts, experience, and love wherever we are.**”*

Here is to all of us broken and flawed vessels which **God is restoring one by one** through our **Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN**