

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church- April 7th, 2019
5th Sunday in Lent - Text- John 12:1-8

Making a Change

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. For those of you who are my age or a little older, you might remember an ad slogan from the 50s and 60s - "A little dab'll do ya." That was for Brylcreem, wasn't it? The commercial was letting us know that it didn't take much to get the rich, creamy effect one wanted when it came to wavy, manageable hair. Just put on a little Brylcreem, comb it in, and you were good to go. "A little dab'll do ya."

The same concept could be said about perfume. I don't remember where I was but it was a public place. A lady walked by and you could almost see the fumes emanating around her. She hadn't grasped the concept of a little sweetener. Everybody around us was trying to figure out where the source of the fumatic essence was coming from. If her purpose was to get attention, guess what? It worked. I don't remember her or what she looked like. I only remember the smell. Well, that's the issue that presents itself in the Gospel of John this morning. Perfume and smell.

Passover is less than a week away, and Jesus and his disciples have returned to Bethany where they are visiting in the home of their friend Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. John reminds us that this is the same Lazarus that he has raised from the dead. A dinner is being given in honor of Jesus and his disciples, and typically, Martha's working in the kitchen and Mary is at the feet of Jesus. We've seen that scenario before, haven't we? Apparently without a word, Mary takes a huge amount of Nard, pours it all over the feet of Jesus, and wipes it with her hair.

Nard - what is it? Glad you asked. It's a perfumed lotion that comes from a plant that grows in the Himalayan Mountains of India. It is harvested and would have been put on a camel caravan across the long deserts of Asia or on ships from Indian ports to sail up the Red Sea and then be brought to Palestine. Very costly. Text says that it cost about 300 denari. About the wages for a worker for a whole year. So Mary spent thousands of dollars on a perfumed lotion to make Jesus feet smell nice.

Then there is a dialogue between Judas and Jesus involving the waste of the gift. We get the feeling that Judas is not being sincere; after all, his motives have always been suspect. Something about feeling free to get what he could from the treasury of the disciples. Quite the story. Let me tell you what this story is not about.

It's not about Judas and the poor. Oh yes, there is a dialogue between Jesus and Judas where Judas reacts to the waste of the cost of the perfume. Why couldn't she sell it and we could give the money to the poor? Jesus says forget it. Probably saw through the phoniness of Judas and had a great deal of mistrust for him. We will talk more about Judas during Holy Week but for now we can say that this story is not about him.

The story is also not about Stewardship. You know, the sermons that some have preached, that encourages you to be like Mary. To write a check for \$5,000, \$10,000 or more just like Mary, who gave her huge gift - re: the value of the perfume. It's always nice to have those members that have the means to write a nice check but this is not what the story is about.

The story is about Mary and what Mary is saying through her actions. The question of Mary being a reformed prostitute has circulated for years. Some agree, some do not. What we do know is that prostitutes at the time of Jesus wore a necklace where some perfume was kept. A little dab'll do ya. Why Mary had so much perfume is beyond my capability, but, it is quite possible that Mary was sending a message to Jesus. A message that will ring true for each one of us. She breaks upon the necklace and by her actions says – 'my former life is over. I don't need this perfume any more. I want to be your disciple, your follower. I only want to follow your words and your actions. I love you that much.' Wow! The story is about change, for Mary and for us.

Take a moment and consider your life and all that is a part of it. Are there some changes that could be made? A temper that sometimes is out of control?
A judgmental attitude towards people, maybe even those you love?
A problem with self medicating, booze or drugs?

A personality that refuses to forgive? Whatever it is, you and I have the potential for change when we are in the presence of Jesus. When we listen to his words and realize that we are loved by him. That he considers us one of his children.

Like MARY, WE CAN SAY - our former life is over. I want to be your disciple, your follower.

It worked for Mary. She did become his disciple.

It will work for us as well.

Amen

Let it be so.