

Sunday, April 7, 2019
Psalm 126
Philippians 3:4b-14
John 12:1-8

Anointed With Love!

Just close your eyes for a moment and think about these things—fresh bread from the oven, fresh cut grass, bacon, towels dried on a clothesline, oak or maple wood burning in a fire, rain and then pine trees. What do these all have in common? They are favourite smells which invoke in each of us a special memory, a moment of calm and even a time when it seems all else stands still. These smells trigger a place, a time, a moment and call us to remember with appreciation what occurred.

But what about if you smell smoke, rotten eggs, an infant that needs attending to, or even a wet dog? O these odours cause you to react? If there smoke- there is fire, rotten eggs a natural gas leak, a smelly baby or wet dog or cat- an infant or dog that needs cleaning up! And when we do clean the baby or dog up there is something amazing about smelling dog or cat shampoo and even better is the smell of baby powder or shampoo!

Smells we know evoke memories, and special moments or even events that lasted a while. But what happens if and when the odour reminds us of tragedies, or unpleasant memories? When we smell these odours again we are triggered to remember those situations and those situations re-emerge. This often occurs when individuals smell the antiseptic cleaners used in hospitals or even cleaning products used to clean cars or furniture.

It is the week before the Passover when Jesus goes to visit Mary, Martha and Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from death) in the community of Bethany just two miles from Jerusalem. Those at the party were already acquainted with one another. The evening promised to be one of rest, relaxation, food, and fellowship. Lazarus is an old friend not only of Jesus, but at least a few of the apostles. The disciples are interacting with each other and enjoying the evening meal with this family whom Jesus cared a great deal about. The evening delivered on its promises. Per usual, the food Martha prepared was delicious. The service was impeccable. The conversation was uplifting. It was a great evening.

Before Jesus and the apostles said their "good-byes," Mary slipped quietly out of the room. She returned carrying an incredibly expensive jar of perfume which was said to be worth nearly a full year's wages. Mary has let her hair down and by doing this, has drawn attention to herself. She then broke the seal on the jar, knelt before Jesus, and washed his feet with the perfume ointment.

In this unusual act she takes the ointment with a very strong smell and it permeates the air. Coming from the spikenard plant Mary anoints Jesus' feet. It was light red in colour and very expensive because of its origin. This nard would normally have been mixed with inferior oils but this scripture passage tells us that it was pure nard which Mary poured on Jesus' feet.

What do you think of what Mary did to and for Jesus? If you were in that house at that moment what would you have said to Mary or done?

Mary then uses her hair to wipe the excess ointment and when she does this, she changed the societal norm of the day. Women's hair was always covered and so when she loosens her hair to spread the oil on Jesus' feet she also infuses the perfumed smell throughout the house. Mary truly risks who she is and what she is doing. She wants everyone to remember that she is anointing Jesus and doing this before his death and burial. This is because she believes what he has been teaching about- his dying and rising again will soon occur. The house is filled with the fragrance of the perfumed ointment as a sign of what is to come—Jesus' will die and be buried and will need to be further anointed in his death.

Judas Iscariot one of the disciples, asks why this perfume wasn't sold and the money given to the poor? We know that Judas is the one who will betray Jesus but he is also known to look after the money for the disciples and it is in this capacity, Judas stole from the group. Judas waits for Jesus' response. Jesus then tells Judas to leave Mary alone because Mary knew what was to happen to Jesus, and so out of love and devotion to Jesus, Mary wanted to anoint Jesus before his death to indicate her love and devotion to him. She knew that Jesus would need everyone's support as the days would unfold. She wants others to know of her commitment to Christ Jesus and that she would walk the road to his death, prepare his body for burial and grieve.

Judas did not see beyond the cost of the perfumed ointment and how selling it would infuse money into the disciples' funds. But Mary chose to infuse the fragrance of this ointment not only on Jesus' feet, but in the memory of those who were present. This was so that they would remember and not be afraid!

Jesus also tells Judas not to bother Mary because she knew that there was something different about Jesus and how he talked with her and told her what was to come. Jesus receives Mary's gift of love in action for what it is- love in action in honour of her saviour

Judas wanted the money to give to the poor. But Jesus stated that the poor will always be present, but he would not. He knows what's ahead of him but his disciples do not. But Jesus looks upon Mary and knows that what she has done has been an act of love as he prepares to die.

What Mary has done is an IATD - Intentional Acts of True Devotion. After Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave, he came out and he had new life! The result was IATDs! People started following Jesus. Not only did they start following him, they become devoted to him, and their devotion was radical! Those who saw this resurrection put their faith in Jesus. People without reservation, without growing into it, at this one miracle put all their faith in him. And it showed in IATDs. At one time the Jews had been devoted to the Pharisees and the law. Now in crowds they were turning to Jesus, becoming devoted to him, radically devoted to him with the kind of devotion that is dangerous:

Mary anoints Jesus as an act of love. She is giving of herself and Jesus is receiving care and attention. Why did Mary do this? It may have been for a lot of different reasons- a thanksgiving for raising Lazarus from death, for his teachings and insights on how to love; Perhaps she knew what was going to occur but she was not afraid to act because of what other's might think.

Next week we begin Holy Week with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and remember that only a few days later he is nailed to a cross to die. Yet in this story Mary risks who she is in mixed company, in her own home and anoints Jesus before his death. She shows him and others the depth of her love and gratefulness to Jesus. She anoints him with unconditional love.

We too are called to care for one another, unconditionally, - to care for the vulnerable in our midst with compassion and love. And we need to find new ways to celebrate God's love in our lives. Mary took the perfume ointment off the shelf and by pouring it on Jesus' feet, she did something at that dinner party to say to him and to everyone present that Jesus is loved by them all and that they will be with him and love him just as he loves us.

But how do we share this unconditional love like Mary? It is giving yourself, your ability your all for the sake of another. It is risking your faith to tell others about Jesus and it is in the telling that we can relate to Jesus and walk with him as he prepares for Calvary and the cross.

But we must be willing to do this. We must want to break the seal on the jar and stand up for Jesus' sake. It means being willing to pray and sing and share the message that there is something new—the old is gone away. There is something worth pressing on towards. It is the goal of the palms and shouting Hosanna, of the cross and the darkness of Jesus' death as well as the empty tomb. Are we willing to walk the way of the cross knowing that Jesus dies? Are we willing to breathe in the aroma of the oils and know that Jesus will be buried and yet rise again?

Mary anointed Jesus out of love. How do you reach out to others with your love for Jesus? How do you received this gift of anointment and do you pass it on in faith? What does it mean for you as you look at the cross of Jesus? What changes in you because of Jesus' death knowing that he died for you?

Let us pray:
Out of love we praise you and thank you for your Son Jesus who was anointed before his death because of Mary's deep and unconditional love. Help us to receive and to act on this unconditional love and show us how we might bless others as we share and know that Christ is with us now. Bless us we pray. Amen.