

SUNDAY, April 3, 2022

JOHN 12:1-8

THE FRAGRANCE OF ABUNDANT LOVE

WHENEVER SOMEONE HAS SURGERY, I PRAY WITH THEM BEFORE HAND, AND ANNOINT THEM WITH THIS FRAGRANT OIL I HAVE. I TRACE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS ON THEIR FOREHEAD AS A REMINDER OF WHO THEY ARE, AND ALSO ON THEIR HANDS AS A REMINDER OF WHO HOLDS THEM IN THEIR TIME OF NEED. I TELL THEM, THAT WHEN THEY AWAKE FROM SURGERY, TO SMELL THEIR HANDS AND REMEMBER THAT IN THEIR DISCOMFORT AND PAIN, THEY ARE STILL BEING HELD, AND THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM WHO ARE PRAYING FOR THEM AND HOLDING THEM AS WELL.

IF THERE HAPPENS TO BE LOVED ONES PRESENT WHEN I PRAY, I ANNOINT THEIR HANDS AS WELL, SO THAT AS THEY SIT AND WAIT (AND EVEN WORRY), I TELL THEM TO SMELL THEIR HANDS, AND REMEMBER THE SAME WAY THAT THERE IS SOMEONE BIGGER THAN THEY WHO HOLDS THEM CLOSE IN LOVE THROUGH THEIR TIME OF NEED.

SCENT IS A POWERFUL TRIGGER IN OUR BRAIN – IN THE AMYGDALA, THE EMOTIONAL PART OF THE BRAIN. SO, WHEN THE SMELL OF CHLORINE WAFTS THROUGH THE AIR, I AM SUDDENLY DRAWN BACK TO SUMMERS SPENT AT THE REC POOL. AND THE SMELL OF JEAN NATE` REMINDS ME UNFAILINGLY OF MY MOTHER, AS IT WAS HER FAVORITE PERFUME, AND A WHOLE HOST OF MEMORIES COME FLOODING IN, AND FOR A BRIEF MOMENT, SHE'S RIGHT THERE WITH ME.

OUR TEXT TODAY FROM JOHN IS A TEXT THAT FOR THOSE WHO ARE PRESENT WILL BE ONE THAT WHENEVER THEY SMELL THE RICH LUXURIOUS SCENT OF SPIKENARD, WILL BE DRAWN BACK TO THAT MOMENT IN THAT HOUSE, AS IF IT WERE JUST YESTERDAY.

SCHOLARS SAY THAT THE PERFUME MARY USED WAS WORTH IN TODAY'S MONEY AS MUCH AS \$10,000. IT WAS SO COSTLY BECAUSE OF THE GREAT LENGTHS ONE HAD TO GO TO IN ORDER TO GET THE ROOT TO EXTRACT THE OILS FOR IT. IT CAME ALL THE WAY FROM INDIA, THIS OIL WAS PRECIOUS AND RARE, HENCE ITS COST.

OUNCE AFTER OUNCE, 12 IN ALL, DRENCHED HIS SKIN, SOAKED THE HEM OF HIS GARMENT, AND POOLED ON THE FLOOR AROUND HIS FEET. WITH THE FRAGRANT PERFUME RUNNING THROUGH HER FINGERS, MARY ANNOINTED AND MASSAGED JESUS' FEET – RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF GOD AND EVERYBODY. THIS WAS SCANDALOUS – AND GLORIOUS ALL AT THE SAME TIME.

THEY SAY THAT ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS. MARY, WHO ONCE SAT AT JESUS' FEET TO LEARN, AND FELL AT HIS FEET TO WEEP, NOT KNELT AT HIS FEET TO OFFER A PRICELESS GIFT.

THE FACT THAT MARY ACTUALLY USES HER HAIR – HER HAIR – WHICH SCRIPTURE TELLS US IS HER GLORY, MEANING HER HAIR IS CLOSELY TIED TO HER SENSE OF SELF WORTH AND RESPECT, SHE USES THAT, TO WIPE JESUS' FEET AFTER SHE BATHES THEM IN THIS RICH PERFUME. SHE USES HER HAIR TO DRY A MAN'S FEET – THE LOWEST JOB FOR THE LOWEST SERVANT, AND THOUGH IT WAS AGAINST JEWISH CONVENTION FOR A HOSTESS TO APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF MEN WITH UNBOUND HAIR, THERE SHE WAS. UNBOUND.

SO MUCH SO, THAT IN MATTHEW'S TELLING OF THIS STORY, JESUS SAYS, "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, WHEREVER THIS GOSPEL IS PREACHED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, WHAT SHE HAS DONE WILL BE TOLD IN MEMORY OF HER."

AND HERE WE ARE – OVER 2000 YEARS LATER, STILL TALKING ABOUT AN OUTRAGEOUSLY ABUNDANT DISPLAY OF LOVE FOR JESUS. I IMAGINE MARY WANTED TO SHOW NOT ONLY THAT SHE LOVED JESUS, BUT THAT SHE UNDERSTOOD, AS HE PREPARED TO HEAD TOWARD JERUSALEM, WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO BEAR. I ALSO THINK SHE WAS SO OVERWHELMED BECAUSE OF WHAT HE DID IN RAISING HER BROTHER LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD, THAT SHE WANTED TO EXPRESS HER LOVE IN THE MOST GENEROUS WAY SHE POSSIBLY COULD.

I WANT TO THINK ABOUT THE CONTEXT OF THIS STORY FOR A MINUTE. CHAPTER 11 CLOSES WITH WHAT ARE KNOWN AS THE BOOK OF SIGNS – SIGNS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE DEITY OF CHRIST AS SEEN BY MIRACLES HE PERFORMED. CHAPTER 12 ACTS LIKE A BRIDGE OR A TRANSITION INTO THE LAST WEEK OF JESUS' LIFE, SO REALLY, BY THE END OF CHAPTER 11, THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS DECIDE THEY HAVE TO PUT AN END TO ALL THIS MIRACLE MAKING. THEY DECIDE THEY MUST ARREST AND GET RID OF JESUS.

I TELL YOU THIS, BECAUSE AS CHAPTER 12 BEGINS, JESUS HAS A PRICE ON HIS HEAD, AND THE DISCUSSION AROUND JERUSALEM IS "WHERE IS JESUS AND WILL HE SHOW UP FOR PASSOVER?" BECAUSE IF HE DID SHOW UP, HE WOULD BE ARRESTED AND EXECUTED.

BACK IN JOHN 11, WE READ ABOUT A PARTY BEING HELD IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE LEPER – MOST LIKELY TO CELEBRATE THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD (MARY AND MARTHA'S BROTHER). IT WAS A THANK-YOU DINNER FOR JESUS, AND AN INCREDIBLY BRAVE THING FOR JESUS'S FRIENDS TO DO, BECAUSE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WANTED ANYONE WHO KNEW OF JESUS' WHEREABOUTS TO CONTACT THEM. FAILURE TO DO SO COULD GET THEM JAILED OR WORSE AS ACCESSORIES IN CRIME. SO, WHILE THE REST OF THE TOWN PLAYED A WAIT AND SEE IF JESUS WILL SHOW FOR PASSOVER KIND OF GAME, JESUS FRIENDS WERE HAVING A PARTY FOR HIM.

NOW IF YOU THINK ABOUT THIS, WHAT THIS COULD MEAN FOR LAZARUS, WAS THAT HE WAS IN DANGER OF LOSING HIS LIFE – AGAIN. BECAUSE THE FRIENDS CAME NOT ONLY TO SEE AND THANK JESUS, BUT ALSO TO SEE LAZARUS WHOM HE HAD RAISED FROM THE DEAD. SO, THE CHIEF PRIESTS MADE PLANS TO KILL LAZARUS AS WELL. (ACCORDING TO {11:9-10})

WHERE DOES IT END? GET RID OF JESUS, AND LAZARUS, AND ANYONE WHO AIDS AND ABETS HIM?

I THINK MARY UNDERSTOOD ALL TOO WELL WHAT WAS GOING ON – WHICH IS WHY SHE ANNOINTED HIS FEET – YOU DON'T ANNOINT THE FEET OF SOMEONE WHO IS GOING TO BE CROWNED KING – YOU ANNOINT THEIR HEAD. YOU ONLY ANNOINT THE FEET OF SOMEONE WHO IS DEAD. MARY UNDERSTOOD ALL TOO WELL. AND IF YOU LOOK AT OTHER TIMES THIS MARY SHOWS UP WITH JESUS, SHE IS AT HIS FEET AS WELL. THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT PEOPLE WHO SPEND TIME AT THE FEET OF JESUS. WHEN WE PRACTICE THE DISCIPLINE OF SPENDING TIME WITH GOD IN PRAYER AND HIS WORD EVERY DAY, WE DEVELOP A MATURITY THAT LEADS TO SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT AND WISDOM. AND WE DEVELOP A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT THAT MAKES NO SENSE TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER. THIS IS WHY MARY GOT IT – SHE SPENT TIME, DAY BY DAY AT THE FEET OF JESUS.

WHEN MARY USED THE FRAGRANT PERFUME TO ANNOINT JESUS FEET, THE FRAGRANCE FILLED THE WHOLE HOUSE. IT PERMEATED EVERYTHING. IT CARRIED FAR AND WIDE SINCE THE EVOCATIVE SCENT OF SPIKENARD COULD BE SMELLED UP TO A HALF A MILE AWAY. THE NEIGHBORS IN BETHANY NO DOUBT LIFTED THEIR HEADS AND SNIFFED THE EVENING AIR.

SO, WHEN SHE WIPED THE OIL OFF HIS FEET WITH HER HAIR, THEN SHE CARRIED THAT FRAGRANCE WITH HER INTO THAT NEXT WEEK AND TO HIS DEATH. THE ABUNDANCE SHE GAVE TO JESUS WAS GIVEN BACK TO HER, AND THEN SHARED WITH ALL WHO CAME IN CONTACT WITH HER. THEY CAUGHT A WHIFF OF THE FRAGRANCE AND COULDN'T HELP BUT THINK OF JESUS.

AND SURELY THE FRAGRANCE STAYED ON JESUS' FEET DURING THOSE LAST DAYS. REMEMBER IT WAS A STRONG AND COSTLY OIL. ITS SCENT WAS MEANT TO LAST A LONG TIME, AND SHE Poured ALL OF IT ONTO HIM. SO EVERYWHERE HE WENT – AS HE RODE INTO JERUSALEM ON PALM SUNDAY, AS HE CLEARED THE TEMPLE, AS HE GATHERED FOR THAT FINAL MEAL WITH HIS DISCIPLES, AS HE APPEARED BEFORE THE HIGH PRIESTS AND PILATE.

I IMAGINE THE FRAGRANCE OF MARY'S PERFUME STILL LINGERED AS A REMINDER OF HER ABUNDANT LOVE Poured OUT. AND WHEN HIS LAST WORDS WERE UTTERED ON THE CROSS – WORDS OF FORGIVENESS AND COMPLETION – DID HE CATCH THE SCENT OF THAT FRAGRANCE TO REMIND HIM THAT HE HAD BEEN DEEPLY AND GREATLY LOVED?

AND SO, MY FRIENDS, WHAT IS YOUR ACT OF LOVE IN RESPONSE TO THE TREMENDOUS LOVE Poured OUT FOR YOUR SAKE? FOR THAT IS THE REAL QUESTION POSED BY THE SCRIPTURES TODAY. HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE LOVE Poured OUT BY JESUS ON OUR BEHALF? HOW DO WE POur OUT A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT THAT CAN'T HELP BUT TOUCH OTHERS?

AND WHAT WILL OTHERS REMEMBER IN OUR WAKE? WILL THEY CATCH THE SWEET FRAGRANCE OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST, WHICH HAS ANNOINTED US AND BATHED US TIME AND AGAIN IN OUR HOUR OF NEED? WILL THEY IN TURN BE ANNOINTED AND BATHED AS A RESULT OF DRAWING NEAR?

MAY THE FRAGRANCE WE EXUDE, BE THAT OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST – MAY THOSE IN WHOM WE COME IN CONTACT, CATCH A GLIMPSE OF WHO GOD IS BY THE SWEET SCENT OF HIS LOVE COMING FROM OUR VERY PORES, AND MAY THE VERY FRAGRANCE OF HIS SPIRIT SO FILL THIS PLACE THAT OTHERS ARE DRAWN DEEPLY IN TO BE RENEWED AND REFRESHED - TO HIS HONOR AND GLORY. IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.