

I.N.I.

Third Sunday in Lent
Feb. 28, 2016
Mark 14:3-9

In Christ Jesus, whose sacrificing love for us leads us to willingly sacrifice ourselves for His service, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Martin Luther once wrote, "You will appreciate the sweetness of heaven more if you have tasted and experienced the bitterness of hell." If we would apply those words to our text this morning we could say: "You will appreciate the forgiveness of your sins more only when you realize the great debt of sins you owe." The more we realize our own sinfulness, the more we will be able to appreciate the great sacrifice Jesus made in order to earn for us the forgiveness of our sins.

There were two times that we know of from Scripture when Jesus had fragrant oil poured on Him as He ate dinner. One is recorded in Luke 7. Jesus was in Galilee. It was about a year before His crucifixion. He was invited to the home of a Pharisee named Simon to eat dinner. A woman who was a known public sinner came into the Pharisee's house and poured oil on Jesus' feet and with her tears she washed His feet and then wiped them with her hair. Jesus said to her, **"YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN...YOUR FAITH HAS SAVED YOU. GO IN PEACE."**

The other time is recorded in Matthew, Mark and John and it took place on the Saturday evening before Palm Sunday. This time Jesus and His disciples were in the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany. We are told in John's Gospel that Lazarus, Mary and Martha also were there. At some point in the meal John tells us it was Mary who walked up to Jesus and broke open an alabaster flask of very expensive oil of spikenard and poured it on Jesus. There is an uproar among the disciples, especially Judas but Jesus defends Mary. What's this all about?

Well our theme this morning tells us. Again our overall, main theme for these Lenten Sundays is Jesus saying "Assuredly"...or "Verily, Verily," or "I Tell you the Truth."

I TELL YOU THE TRUTH . . . FRUITS OF FAITH WILL BE REMEMBERED

I. THIS FAITH SHOWED ITSELF IN ACTIONS WHICH ARE UNASHAMED.

Put yourself in Mary's sandals. She had known Jesus for some time now. She and her siblings were dearly loved by Him and they also loved Him. Remember how she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him while her sister Martha busied herself making the meal. Jesus praised Mary for her actions, for putting the hearing of His words her first priority. Jesus said, **"BUT ONE THING IS NEEDED, AND MARY HAS CHOSEN THAT GOOD PART, WHICH WILL NOT BE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER."**

Later, only about 3-4 months before today's event, we heard Mary tell Jesus that if He would have come a little earlier her brother Lazarus would not have died. She believed that Jesus could have healed him. But Jesus did something even more amazing. He raised her brother Lazarus back to life. Imagine her astonishment and joy!

Now it is about 4 months later and Jesus is back in town in

Bethany. Jesus recently has been speaking about His death in Jerusalem. He is determined to go to Jerusalem for the Passover and Mary has another opportunity to see her beloved Lord. As she prepares to go to Simon's house she takes with her the marble-like flask with its contents of the finest perfume, worth a whole year's wages. She has, no doubt, been saving it for a special occasion. That occasion is now.

In humble thankfulness for all that Jesus had already done for her and was going to do for her she unashamedly entered Simon's home, broke open the flask and poured the fragrant oil on Jesus' head and His feet as He reclined at the table.

**II. THIS FAITH PROCEEDED OUT OF A THANKFUL HEART,
KNOWING THAT JESUS WAS PAYING ONE'S DEBT OF SIN.**

Why did Mary use the whole amount of oil? We don't know for sure, but I believe that when she realized the great debt of sin she owed to God and the great sacrifice her Savior was going to make for her, nothing was too great to sacrifice for Him. She didn't use a drop or two of the costly perfume, she broke the flask and poured it all on Jesus, a whole pounds worth.

This One, her Lord, had changed her life and was soon to give His own life for her, a sinner. She poured every last drop on His head and on His feet and then in John we are told that she humbly wiped Jesus' feet with her hair, just like the woman had done earlier in Galilee.

What an amazing act of love, humble service, thanksgiving and honor to Jesus who in less than a week would have a crown of thorns on His head and nails in His feet.

**III. THIS FAITH HAS JESUS' OWN ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS
AND REMEMBRANCE.**

"What a waste!" That was the cry of some who were there, especially John tells us, of Judas. But Judas had ulterior motives. He was the treasurer of the disciples but he was also a thief. He could only think of how much he could have embezzled from that amount had she given it to him to give to the poor.

Was it a waste? Let's listen to Jesus: **BUT JESUS SAID, "LET HER ALONE. WHY DO YOU TROUBLE HER? SHE HAS DONE A GOOD WORK FOR ME. FOR YOU HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU ALWAYS, AND WHENEVER YOU WISH YOU MAY DO THEM GOOD; BUT ME YOU DO NOT HAVE ALWAYS. SHE HAS DONE WHAT SHE COULD. SHE HAS COME BEFOREHAND TO ANOINT MY BODY FOR BURIAL. ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, WHEREVER THIS GOSPEL IS PREACHED IN THE WHOLE WORLD, WHAT THIS WOMAN HAS DONE WILL ALSO BE TOLD AS A MEMORIAL TO HER."**

Jesus read Mary's heart. He knew that she did this out of a repentant, loving faith. She was preparing His body for His upcoming death which would give to her full and free forgiveness of sins. She realized her great debt of sin and she realized Jesus' great sacrifice to pay that debt and Jesus wanted her and all the rest, all the world, to know that. So today, whenever and wherever this lesson is taught and heard Jesus receives the glory and honor, but Mary is also remembered.

Could Mary have done other good things with her costly perfume? Of course she could have. It wouldn't have been wrong for her to sell it and give the money to the poor. It wouldn't have been wrong for her to use it on herself or someone else. She chose to use it on the Lord.

The point is what other people think we should do isn't why we give what we give or do what we do. We give and we act for the Lord. The

Lord calls our gifts, big or small as they are, **A GOOD WORK FOR ME.**

Finally it all comes down to the reason for our giving, our giving of our offerings, our giving of our time, our giving of our service. Is Jesus worth it? Is Jesus worth our time? Our money? Our sacrifice? Our service? The world in which we live shouts, "No!" The selfish voice inside of me even sometimes shouts, "No!" And, unfortunately, some of my past words and actions have shouted, "No!" It's a waste of time, money and effort.

But then when God's Word leads us to repent of our sins, and we take our eyes off of self we look to Jesus as the only One who alone is worthy to be Lord of our life. As we hear the familiar passion history read week after week, we are reminded that it was not Mary who went too far with her offering, but Jesus. He went overboard when that which He broke was not an alabaster jar full of perfume, but His own body and that which He poured out was His blood to the very last drop on the cross. When He did that, the fragrance of "Father, forgive them" filled the world. From the soft infant cry in the manger to the agonizing cry on the cross, Jesus was saying something to the Devil, to demons, and to death itself. He was saying He was determined to save the world, no matter the cost. Jesus was saying He was determined to save you and me, no matter the cost. That is how much He loved us!

Love gives! Love is not love if it first calculates the cost. When the Holy Spirit leads us to meditate on and appreciate the cost of Jesus' love for us, something miraculous happens. Like Mary, we love—without calculating the cost—we love, because He first loved us. With smiles on our faces and joy in our hearts, we'll break our own alabaster jars, being less logical and more generous, less analytical and more compassionate, less self-centered and more Christ-centered, less concerned about what others' think and more anxious to honor the One who loved us.

As we see ourselves doing just that, know that it won't just be Mary's fruits of faith that will be remembered by her Savior. Ours will be remembered as well. When Jesus comes again, He'll say, **'FOR I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU GAVE ME FOOD; I WAS THIRSTY AND YOU GAVE ME DRINK; I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU TOOK ME IN; I WAS NAKED AND YOU CLOTHED ME; I WAS SICK AND YOU VISITED ME; I WAS IN PRISON AND YOU CAME TO ME.'** (Matt. 25:35-36).

Much of the time, we're not even going to realize we did that. Why? Because our focus was not on ourselves but on our Savior who loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. It was His love that drove Him to the cross. It was His love that kept Him on the cross. And it is His forgiving love that moves us to love in return.

And that is why when we survey His wondrous cross as we just sang,

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Amen.

