

Mark 14:1-11

This woman in St. Mark's narrative remains nameless. "*There came a woman,*" is all we're told. But perhaps this is just as well. For now we are able to put our name on her. Indeed, there is a striking parallel. She comes into the house of Simon the leper while Jesus is reclining at the table. This is not within her comfort zone. She is in the midst of her judges. Everyone there has an opinion about her, and every opinion is not a good one. She deserves this, for she is a public sinner. No doubt this is how she acquired her jar of expensive perfume. It was a "gift" from one of her customers.

But that was her past. It is not her present life because of Jesus. He changed her profoundly. He loved her unconditionally. He forgave her. And this is why she is there. She loves Jesus with all her heart, and she wants to show her love. She pours the costly perfume over His head...all of it. She could have sold it and spent the money on herself. But as her public sins are forgiven, so now she brings to Jesus that which she gained because of her sins. Both her sin and the perfume of her sin is given to Jesus. It is no longer on her own head; now it is all on His head.

And her judges react in anger. They scold her to her face. They shame her. How dare she waste her perfume on Jesus! How dare she give anything to Jesus - her costly perfume or her sinfulness, the cost of which, in their opinion, was too great to ever be forgiven.

You are that woman, my friend, and so am I, when our sins are known to others; when we, with shame, enter into this house where Jesus waits at the table for us. We are that woman when we feel that others are judging us; when we know we deserve to be judged, if not by others, then by Him who is the Supreme Judge.

Yet listen to His words, He defends this woman. "*Leave her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a beautiful thing to Me.*" Though everyone is against her, she has a place with Jesus. He does not reject her. He will never shame her. He took her shame even as He took her sin. He does not despise the gift of her perfume. He calls it a beautiful thing for it is given out of love for Him.

You, my friend, always have a place with Jesus also. How could He ever despise you? He took your sin to His cross and died for you. He was despised in your place. All the sins of your past are forgiven. Let others have their opinions of you. Let them be judges if they want. Your Judge is also your Savior. And even the tiniest act you do for Jesus, done out of love for Him, He calls it a beautiful thing.

"*This woman,*" He says, "*is anointing My body beforehand.*" Soon He will die and be buried. And though she does not know it now, that which she pours on His head is being done for His death and burial.

The same thing this woman does for Jesus, He does for you in your baptism. Upon your head He pours out His grace in the water of the font combined with the Word. And you now are prepared beforehand for your death and burial. No accusation spoken against you can nullify your anointing of water, Word, and Spirit. No sin you have done can cancel that which your baptism declares - that you are and remain God's forgiven one; that you always have a place with Jesus, now in this life, and forever in heaven. All your sins are covered completely with the sweet smelling perfume of Jesus' innocent sufferings and death. Your entire life is a pleasing aroma to God through Jesus Christ.

All the beautiful things that you do for Jesus are precious in His sight. They are done out of your love for Him. But the most beautiful thing of all is what He has done for you. And what He did in His death and burial, He also did out of love - love for you. That beautiful thing is the Gospel which stands forever. Amen.