

McCabe United Methodist Church
Wednesday, February 20, 2013
Poured Out: Elements of a Resurrection
Oil – Mary, friend of Jesus
John 12:1-11

Jesus set in motion a series of events that would change the world. His notoriety had spread in three years of teaching, miracles, and flying in the face of established authority when he felt people were suffering. He was beloved by many, but misunderstood, hated and feared by some who were in power. We are entering a season that changed the world. Holy week was a week of things poured out for us. Yes, God's love poured out for us. During this Lenten season, we will encounter some very tangible elements poured out that will offer us a glimpse into the drama of Holy week.

Last week we faced the element of blood poured out on the cross. It is difficult for us to name, claim, and lament the injustices, the blood spilled, in violent ways still today. Tonight we will look at the oil as one of our essential elements for the resurrection of our hope.

On page 1300 of your pew Bible, hear these words from John 12:1-11:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at table with him. Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came, not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus also to death, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

This passage doesn't tell us much about Mary and what prompted her to buy the expensive oil or why she chose to put it on Jesus feet but I can imagine what may have drawn her to do it.

Imagine Mary before the day of this feast; she is out shopping, walking thru the market, looking at all the goods for sale, and deciding what she should make for the meal. On her mind would have been who was coming and probably what Jesus had been telling them. When she saw the oil, whether it was a voice or a feeling, something told her to purchase it despite the cost. She probably didn't really know at the time the reason for buying it. She obeyed an unknown voice. She then went about her shopping and preparation.

The day of the supper, again Mary went about doing what she was expected to do when having guests over but at some point, that voice or feeling came over her again, telling her to wash Jesus' feet with the oil.

Oil was an essential element of life in the time of Jesus, it came in many forms and was used for many purposes: to make something smell better, to soften the skin, for healing, for burial, and to mark someone as "anointed," special, honored, lifted up. We hear of all these purposes in the scriptures. Mary's oil and her gesture would turn out to be an ironic precursor to the anointing of Jesus' dead body for his burial only a few days later.

To me, that voice or feeling was God prompting Mary to do something important and she obeyed. Have you ever heard a voice or felt something that was prompting you to do something? Maybe you didn't understand what, how, or why? Did you obey or just let it go and do nothing?

I had such an experience many years ago when my brother-in-law, Tim, was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. I had a deep fear of death so I couldn't go see him in the hospital; I just went about my usual life.

One day while cleaning the house a friend, who knew the dilemma that we were in, called and told me to turn on the TV and listen to what Dr. Bernie Siegel was talking about in his new book, *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*. Dr Siegel believes that God gave us amazing bodies that can heal themselves with the right kind of mindset. He touched on how he makes tapes for sick people to listen to, to help in that process. I sat mesmerized by what he had to say. As I watched, a feeling, that I can't quite explain, came over me, an ache in my chest, a kind of feeling of urgency, and a voice seemed to be telling me to go help Tim. I resisted thinking I don't know anything about how to help him and went about my business.

But that feeling would not leave me alone so I figured I would at least get the book and see if there was anything I could do. Every bookstore in town was sold out and at the library the book was already checked out. So I got on the waiting list.

Still that feeling would not leave me so I went about making a tape for Tim following what Dr. Siegel had talked about in the show. He hadn't given any details about how or what to say. When I completed the tape I called up Tim's wife and told her about what was happening to me and what I did and she encouraged me to come to the hospital with the tape and tell Tim what was happening. I got up the courage and did it.

Weeks later, I finally got a copy of Dr Siegel's book and at the very back of the book it tells how to make inspirational tapes and I had done exactly what he recommended.

Like Mary, I had depended on a feeling or voice without knowing how, why, or what the outcome would be. I truly believe that God is that voice and/or feeling. I try to listen but I'm not perfect and sometimes I ignore the promptings.

As my tape was important to Tim, Mary's oil was important to Jesus and even more so to the others that were at the supper otherwise we would not have this story today to pass on as they did.

Listening to God's promptings today is as important as they were back then. God gave each of us gifts to be used when he prompts us, he is there to help us use and share them, guiding us, and we need to obey by using them for his glory and pass it on to the future generations.

Join us each week during Lent as we learn more about the 'elements' that were poured out for us. Then come on Good Friday for a special evening service and personally experience these 'elements' as told by those who were there.

Please open your red hymnal to number 398, *Jesus Calls Us*. We will sing verses 1 through 4 and as Julie plays through it two more times, read verse 5 to yourself and think about how God has poured his love into you and how he may be calling you to serve.