

## Ash Wednesday

**Text: Mark 14:3-9**

**Theme: Misjudging Eyes**

About 10 years ago my dad gave me a watch. It wasn't a Rolex, but it was a nice Seiko watch, which cost him about \$130. I was not very happy about it. My dad didn't have a lot of money, and I thought that the last thing that he should be spending money on was a new watch for me, especially because the watch that I had worked just fine. I wanted to march right back to Kohl's and get his money back. But he insisted. He said that I had helped him with a number of things, and he wanted to do something nice for me. I begrudgingly accepted that watch because it meant a lot to him. He died a few months later, and today that watch is one of the most prized possessions that I have. I think that I replaced the band for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time last week.

It is easy to misjudge when someone wants to do a good thing for us. We might also misjudge the actions that other people do in thanksgiving to God. Tonight I'd like to look at the misjudging eyes of the disciples when Mary anointed Jesus with expensive perfume.

I. It is so tempting to misjudge the actions of other people.

The disciples misjudged Mary. Jesus was at the home of a man named Simon the Leper. A banquet was being thrown in His honor. Suddenly, a woman came bursting in. She broke open a bottle of expensive perfume, and poured it over Jesus from head to toe. In His Gospel John writes that she wiped the perfume with her hair, and that the entire house was filled with the fragrance. It must have been worse than a Bath and Body store. This is a story that stirs so many senses, the sound of the bottle breaking, the smell of the perfume, and the sight of Jesus dripping wet with perfume. It says that this perfume was worth 300 Denarii, which would have been 300 days wages for a common laborer. She drenched Jesus with \$30,000-\$40,000 worth of perfume!

What did the disciples think? "What a waste!" They were all thinking the same thing, "This could have been sold and the money given to the poor." They even began to scold her. Can you imagine how her heart must have begun to sink. She had a special gift for Jesus, and when she gave it, the Lord's disciples rebuked her.

Judas was so enraged, that he left and went to the chief priests to ask what they would give him to betray Jesus. They offered 30 pieces of silver, which I have read is about worth half of what this bottle of perfume cost. Judas' hatred of this woman and Jesus had become so great that he was willing to betray Jesus to death for half the cost of this perfume, that was used to anoint our Lord.

Do we ever have such misjudging eyes? If someone gives a special gift to our Lord, it is tempting to look at it as though it were given with bad intentions or the money should have been given for something that made more sense. Someone gives a special gift to someone else, and it is very tempting to become envious. Don't we often think that there must be something sinister behind the things that people do for our Lord or for other people? Too often we think, "Well, that seemed like a waste of money."

The biggest problem for us is that when we judge others, it begins to consume us, just as it did with Judas. Jesus' grace and mercy, and those expressions of thanksgiving become repulsive. It is repulsive if we have not received the grace and mercy of our Lord ourselves.

II. Such acts are given out of Thanksgiving for God's love for us.

We don't do them to get the favor of the Lord or other people. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "*Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men to be seen by them.*" The pharisees would often give their gifts with trumpets, so that people would take notice. Remember the story of the widow's mite. It says that people were impressed with the great gifts that were being given at the temple. No one noticed the widow's mite except for Jesus.

God is not pleased when we give gifts to earn His favor or to show other people how good and generous we are. Even the apostles didn't understand this yet. In Matthew 19:27 Peter told Jesus, "*We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?*" It is tempting to believe that there should be a "tit for tat." I'll give something to Jesus, but then He should reward me in some way. Such thoughts have no understanding of grace and will leave us bitter as Judas was.

True sacrifices are given out of thankfulness for what the Lord has done for us. John gives us a few more details about this dinner. Lazarus, the man whom Jesus raised from the dead, was at the meal. His sister Martha was serving. That is when Mary barges in, breaks open the bottle of perfume, and anoints Jesus. She was so thankful that the Lord had raised her brother from the dead. Imagine if Jesus had raised a close relative or friend of yours who died. Wouldn't you have done the same thing? This was done out of pure thanksgiving.

It's tragic that the disciples didn't learn anything from Mary. When Jesus was condemned to death, Judas was seized with remorse. What did He do? He took the 30 pieces of silver and threw them in the temple and confessed, "*I have betrayed innocent blood.*" He was given the most horrendous answer ever given, "*What is that to us. See to it yourself.*" He went out and hanged himself. Had he learned from Mary and not misjudged her, he would have trusted that Jesus paid for this sin too. He would have confessed His sin to the Lord, and received the Lord's forgiveness. He could have used those 30 pieces of silver in any number of ways to thank God for His great mercy. Instead, he perished in his guilt.

When we think of the price that Christ paid to redeem us from our sins, we realize that it was much more than 300 Denarii or 30 pieces of silver. It was His shed holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death on the cross. He gave His innocent life in our place, that as He rose from the dead, we will also rise to eternal life. When we think of all that He has done for us, we cannot help but offer our entire lives to Him as living sacrifices. It is as Paul writes, "*In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*" As Christians we thank and praise the Lord in all we do out of thanksgiving for His grace and mercy to us. We also join with people in thanking God when they praise Him for what He has done for them, and like Jesus we will even graciously accept those acts of thanks that people show to us. The world might think that we are crazy. They might ridicule and rebuke us, but Jesus said, "*Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.*" Jesus loves those acts that are given out of a heart of faith and thanksgiving.

This all comes down to the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, “*You shall not bear false witness,*” and Luther’s explanation where it says that we should put the best construction on everything. (explain everything in the kindest possible way.) When our eyes are full of judgement of other people, we will soon be offended by the graciousness of the Gospel. But when we look for the good in others and rejoice in God’s grace for sinners like us, our hearts find joy and thankfulness in the grace and mercy of God for sinners like us.

Amen.

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