

SERMON FOR LENT 1 AND ASH WEDNESDAY

TEXT: MARK 14: 1-9

THEME: MISJUDGING EYES

And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴ There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹ And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

In the name of Jesus:

A few years ago I went to the eye doctor to get my eyes checked. Things were to say the least, hazy. It was like I was looking through wax paper. After my eye exam, the doctor diagnosed that I had cataracts on both eyes. He described it as like driving with a dirty windshield. He told me that I would need surgery to correct my vision, and that, when my cataracts were taken off, it would be like looking through a clear windshield. And he was right! After my surgery, I could see clearly. The sky was bluer. Whites were whiter. I had clear vision, and it made me appreciate what it means to have good vision. Once the windshield is cleaned, it makes all the difference in the world.

You know, then how troubling it is when you get something in your eyes. You can't see, it is painful, uncomfortable, and you seek immediate relief. If you get ashes in your eyes, then you certainly won't be able to see clearly. The sin that affects all of us is more than dirt in our eyes, it is a poison that affects our entire being. Sin dirties our consciences so that we can't see things clearly. It so poisons us that we distort the things that are good, or we look upon that which has been created beautiful and we misuse or misjudge its value.

Throughout His ministry Jesus tells us to give to the needy. When He says "when you give to the needy," He is stating that He expects us to do this. In fact, in the Gospel lesson for tonight, Jesus says the same thing: "You always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them" (Mark 14:7). But as sinners we usually misjudge the purpose of such good deeds. We look at the good deeds of others and are impressed by their religiosity. But Jesus cautions us against judging the good deeds of others, because some do good in order to be seen by others, so that they receive the praise and glory of men.

God, though, is able to look into the heart. He sees that we can't see clearly. He knows that we misjudge people and motives. We even misjudge ourselves, thinking that we are better than we actually are.

In our human way of thinking, we presuppose that we as sinners must do good in order to be loved by God. But God tells us differently.

All of our deeds are like dirty clothes in the sight of God. We are so tainted and poisoned with sin that none of us can do the good that God wants us to do, much less have the proper motivation for doing good. God shows us that we have dirty consciences, and misjudging eyes. What we need is clarity, clear eyesight, a good conscience, to not only see how sinful we really are, but to also see that it isn't our good works, our religiosity or our potential that saves us. Jesus saves us, for He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

We see in the Gospel lesson tonight that the Passover and Passion were only a couple of days away. Jesus knew this and had repeatedly told his disciples that the time was growing nearer when He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Jesus had His mind on the cross, but those who were guests at Simon's house party that day didn't know that. They were stunned when this uninvited woman came into the home, broke open the jar of perfume, and dumped it on the head of our Lord. This is an expensive shampoo, for the Bible says that this could have been sold for what would amount to almost \$30,000 today. Seeing that the feeding of the 5000 would have cost almost \$20,000 to accomplish in today's dollars, can you imagine how much bread you could buy for \$30,000? No wonder the people at the party were complaining! What a waste, they thought, of good perfume that could have been sold for thousands of dollars in today's world.

But Jesus sees clearly. He always sees clearly, so He comes to the woman's defense and says that this is something beautiful, for it prepares Jesus for the work He is about to do to save the world from sin, Satan, and death. The dinner guests didn't get it, because they couldn't

see what was happening in the grand plan of God. But this was according to God's plan, for Jesus was the Anointed One, the Savior sent by God to die and rise again for sinners. Jesus was about to pour out His blood to heal us, to forgive us to save us. Jesus came to die for you. I can imagine that there was quite an aroma in that house when the perfume was poured out on Jesus' head. Much like a sanctuary filled with blooming Easter lilies, it must have been a tremendous, beautiful smell! And Jesus' death on the cross was a pleasing aroma ascending before the Father's throne in heaven! For the Bible says, "Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2). The smell of Christ's holy person and atoning work turned away the wrath of God against sinners once and for all.

God has washed away your sins in the waters of your Baptism. The rosy red blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sins. The Holy Spirit not only gives you faith in Jesus but He also gives you a clean conscience. The Bible says that Baptism saves us, not by washing dirt from the body but by giving us a clean conscience so that we can see our sins and realize that we need a Savior. So the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, to convict us of sin, righteousness and judgment: because we are sinners and don't recognize or believe in God and His love, to show us that the love of God lasts forever in Jesus, and that by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection our sins are forgiven, Satan is defeated, and we are given good consciences before God. God will never punish you for He has punished Jesus. He will never damn you for He damned Jesus on the cross. He will never hurt you, for He loves you and cares for you. You are now His child, and are empowered by the Spirit to live your earthly

life in love for God and in love for others.

That is what that woman was doing and showing when she poured the perfume on Jesus' head. She loved Jesus and wanted to show how much Jesus meant to her. Jesus recognized her love and faith when He said: "Truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark 14:9). She was an integral part of the Gospel story being fulfilled, and the Gospel is always about forgiveness of sins being received by faith.

The Gospel of Luke records that Jesus was in the house of a Pharisee named Simon. A woman was there who was known around town as a sinner, and she anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped the tears dry with her hair. Jesus recognized her faith and love, by saying that she did this because her sins were forgiven. The one who sinned much had been forgiven much. This was also the case for the woman in the Gospel reading tonight. She doesn't have a name, we really don't need to know her name. She is remembered for her faith in Jesus, her love for Jesus, and how she helped Jesus prepare for His death and burial. As Jesus said, this nameless woman did what she could, she did all she could, she simply lived out her faith in Jesus, and by showing her faith and love, this was a good work, a beautiful thing in God's eyes. She didn't do it to be praised, she did it because she loved Jesus. She has now gone onto her eternal reward, all because Jesus loved her and died and rose again for her.

Jesus died for you rose again for you and loves you as well. He not only loves you, He likes you. Now He places you in your various callings, in certain situations each and everyday, so that you can show your love

for Jesus to others. You have been saved by a free gift of God's love in Jesus. He has purchased and won you not with silver or gold but with His holy and precious blood, so that you are now His own and live under Him as He reigns in heaven above. You now have a good conscience before God. Your sins are forgiven. You belong to Jesus. Why? So that you can now live your life to the glory of God, so that others may see clearly that God saves sinners in Jesus. Amen