

money, and since Judas was the group accountant, and since Judas was the one who was expected to count costs, we would expect him to protest. Right? Isn't there someone in your family who has that role of protesting overspending?

I tried to imagine what that might be like. Here is the best I can do. It's not the same, but just imagine. What if, next Sunday, you came to church and as you walked into the sanctuary, there are \$35,000 worth of flowers filling the sanctuary. These are all cut flowers, nothing that can be re-planted; there are so many, across the front, down the aisles; you can hardly get to your favorite pew; the aroma of fresh flowers is so thick that you can hardly breathe and your allergies are going crazy. You ask, "What is this?" You are told, "The Family minister just wanted to show his love for Jesus. He spent \$35,000 dollars on today's flowers. Isn't that sweet?"

The first thing you are going to ask is, "Did he spend the church's money?" The second thing you are going to ask is, "Did the Finance Committee authorize this expense?" The third thing you are going to ask is, "Aren't there other needs for which that money could have been spent?" The last thing that you would ask is, "Who's in charge of this staff?"

Judas smelled extravagant waste. Don't be too hard on Judas.

But Jesus smelled extravagant love. "Leave her alone," Jesus said." Ouch! That had to hurt. But there was something that Judas did not know. "She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my funeral."

Let me jump ahead a little in the story. Jesus died just before the Sabbath and there was no time to give him a proper burial. They barely got him into the grave on time. The proper burial anointing would

have to wait. Not this Mary, but Mary Magdalene and the other women, came to the tomb early on that first Easter morning in order to anoint the body of Jesus for his proper burial. But there was no body. He had been raised.

What Judas did not know was that what looked like extravagant waste was indeed the burial anointing for Jesus. Judas did not know that. Mary did not know that. For Mary, it was just outlandish, eccentric, extravagant love. But extravagant love always has effects beyond just what was intended.

Years ago, when you encouraged me and told me that I could be successful, it turned my life around. I am what I am today because of you.

But I never knew.

When you sat with me while dad was in the hospital, I learned how important it was to be a healing presence for people in need. Your example continues to inspire me.

But I never knew.

When you worked with the children in Sunday school, I learned that every gift offered in love changes lives. I am a Sunday school worker today because of you.

But I never knew.

Extravagant love is like that. The fragrance lasts long after the event in ways that you will never know.

"The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

What do you smell?



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March 25, 2007
Fifth Sunday of Lent

The Smell of
Extravagance
John 12:1-8

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“The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” What do you smell? As John remembered the story, it was the smell that came to his mind. After all these years, after all that had happened, after all that he had been through, John remembered the fragrance of the perfume. Smells evoke memories. We’ve all experienced that.

You are driving down Madison early on a Saturday morning and you pass the Sunbeam bakery and smell freshly baked bread and you suddenly remember those Saturday mornings at grandmother’s when she baked bread.

You are walking your dog through the neighborhood and you smell freshly mowed grass and you remember that day when you drove up to pick up your first date and her daddy had just finished mowing the yard.

You take your daughter into the kindergarten classroom on that first day of school and smell dusty chalk on the chalk board and you are suddenly sitting in Mrs. Hawkins 3rd grade class that day that you won the spelling bee.

You are walking in the mall and pass a complete stranger but you smell the sweet smell of pipe tobacco on his clothes and you remember your granddaddy’s hug.

You are sitting in your car at a traffic signal and the smell of honeysuckle drifts through your open window and suddenly you are transported back in time to the little league baseball field that had honeysuckle vines covering the outfield fence.

Smells evoke memories. It can be a very powerful experience. The church has understood that for centuries. Attend an Orthodox service and the room will be filled with the smell of incense. It may be suffocating to you, but to the Orthodox faithful, it is the smell of worship.

Smells evoke memories. And memories

can evoke smells. John remembered that night in the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus. As he remembered the story, the people who were there, the conversations that they had, the feelings that got stirred, the actions that resulted, John remembered the smell. “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

It was the smell of extravagance. It was not the same for everyone. For some, it was the smell of extravagant waste. For others, it was the smell of extravagant love. What do you smell?

The text says that it was six days before the Passover. This story brings us very close to Easter. Bethany brings us very close to Jerusalem, just two miles away, where the enemies are conspiring against Jesus. One way or the other, Jesus must be stopped. 11:57 says, “Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.” But here he was, in public, at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

For Mary and Martha and Lazarus, it was a chance to say “thank you.” Here they were all sitting at table together. When Lazarus was sick and when Jesus had not come and when Lazarus had died, and when the tomb was closed and sealed and when the four days of mourning had passed, they never dreamed that they would all sit together at table again. But here they were. This must have been a joyous occasion.

Martha was serving. Where else would she be? Bless her heart, this was who she was. But there are no complaints about serving this time.

Lazarus was at table with Jesus. And there was Mary. We don’t know if Mary had thought about this before hand, but during dinner, she got up, took a pound of

pure nard perfume, and poured it over Jesus’ feet. “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

What was she thinking? A pound of pure nard extract was very expensive. Judas, who was good at accounting, quickly estimated that it was worth at least 300 denarii, the annual salary for a laborer. What would that be in today’s money? Maybe \$35,000? It was probably the most expensive thing that Mary had. Some have suggested that maybe it was a family heirloom.

She took the perfume, a pound of perfume, and poured the whole thing over Jesus feet. She didn’t sprinkle some drops or swathe his feet with a perfumed cloth. She poured the whole thing out until it was puddled on the floor. And, “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Can you imagine? Denise sometimes sprays a couple of sprays of perfume in the air and then walks through the mist. I can tell you, it is usually enough. It doesn’t take a lot. Imagine this pound puddle of pure nard perfume just poured out on the floor. John never forgot it. These many years later, he remembered the smell. It was outlandish, eccentric, and extravagant. What was she thinking?

Actually, we don’t know what Mary was thinking. But we do know what Judas was thinking. For Judas, it was extravagant waste. “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”

Before we judge Judas too harshly, my guess is that we would have said the same thing. I mean, it was a pound of pure nard perfume. A little dab will do ya! It cost a year’s salary. It just puddled there on the floor. You could not put any of it back in the bottle. “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”

Since Judas was in charge of the