

“A Beautiful Thing Done to Jesus”

First Sermon by Rev. Rand Lankheet, at New Horizon URC, March 30, 2014

Scripture text: Mark 14:1-11

Before reading the text: In these weeks before Good Friday, I thought it would be good to be reminded of some of the things that happened to Jesus. On his way to the cross.

Mark, also known as John Mark, was evidently born and raised in Jerusalem.

Mark wrote his gospel based especially on the memories of the apostle Peter. / As you may know, Mark later accompanied the apostle Paul on his first missionary 宣教 journey. Though he proved immature, at that time, evidently the Lord was gracious and he grew in his faith/ Later, Paul asked Mark to come visit him, while in prison in Rome. In the years after that Mark ministered alongside the young pastor, Timothy. -It's back in Mark chapter 11 that Mark records Jesus entry into Jerusalem, which we now call Palm Sunday. The children and the crowds were praising God, as Jesus entered the city. Now, in Mark chapter 14, it is either on Tues or Wed after Palm Sunday. That Friday, Jesus would be crucified 被钉十架 and his body buried.

-The main event we read here is also recorded by the gospel writer John. John tells us that the anonymous 无名 woman in Mark chapter 14, is actually Mary. The Mary who is sister to Martha and Lazarus. Mark tells us that this particular event happened in the home of “Simon the leper.”

[Read 14:1-11. Re-read vs. 6.

Introduction: Jesus says that the woman in the story had done a “good work” for him.

Another translation puts it this way: “She has done a beautiful thing to me.” A beautiful thing.

The woman, Mary, took a large jar of expensive perfume, and poured it upon Jesus’ head.That custom goes back even to very ancient days.

The custom is reflected in the familiar 23rd Psalm. There David writes about being invited to a feast. A feast prepared by the LORD, as his host. The LORD, as it were, has invited him to a wonderful banquet, to a feast. David says of the LORD: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...**You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**”

“You anoint my head with oil.” Fragrant 芳香, perfumed oil. Poured out upon the guest’s head, in a kind of “anointing.” The perfumed oil would be poured out upon the guests in a lavish 丰盛 way, so that it would even run down their hair. As a result, the whole banqueting tent, or banqueting hall, would be filled with the sweet smell of that perfume. Today: aroma-therapy.

-After Mary does that, to Jesus, he calls it a “beautiful thing.” The word translated “beautiful” can also be rendered as a “very fine thing.” Not only was it something good; but the action perfectly fitted the occasion. It was “just right.” Not beautiful in the sense of being “pretty.” But more like we might use the word today, in some contexts. **Illus:** Many of us recently watched some of the events of the Winter Olympics in Sochi. Imagine the snowboard competition. How the top athlete perfectly twisted and turned his body, as he launched himself high into the air. And how he landed just perfectly. We might say: “Beautiful! Wow, that was beautiful.” Not meaning “pretty”...rather, how the athlete made his moves in just the right way. With perfect timing. Complete balance. Every part of his technique, hit the mark.

That’s the description of Mary’s action, anointing Jesus with that expensive perfume. As he is sitting at that banquet, with his friends. It was simply “beautiful.” It fit perfectly.

-We can better understand the “beauty” of what Mary did, by contrasting her action to some of the ugliness around her and around Jesus at that point in his life. [Read Mark 14:1-2.

1. The beautiful action of Mary, can be contrasted to the ugliness of the plotting Jewish leaders.

Mark tells us very early on in his gospel account, that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus.

Already back in chapter 3, when Jesus healed a man on the Jewish Sabbath day. Mark tells us: "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus."

The plotting of the Jewish leaders and teachers gets more intense in that final week of Jesus' life.

As Jesus has entered the ancient capital city of Jerusalem. Just 2 or 3 days earlier.

[Read Mark 11:18. Some jealousy on the part of those Jewish leaders....

Jesus, as a rabbi, was amazing the people with his teaching. And they were not.

-Now, two days later, the timing and the place seems right. The Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin, met in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders already know they can pressure the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to give a guilty verdict 判决. The leaders also know men in Jerusalem who can be bribed to become false witnesses against Jesus.

What ugliness is now surrounding Jesus. Ugliness from those unbelieving, hard of heart, Jewish leaders. The chief priests, the scribes, teachers of rabbinic law.

-Mark tells us that these leaders were now looking for a "sly way 狡猾的方式" to arrest Jesus. Vs. 1. It had to be sly way...a clever and sneaky way. That's the meaning of the word. It had to be clever because they were afraid of the crowds 群众. Crowds of people can get carried away. The Jewish leaders had just seen the crowds get carried away, 2-3 days earlier. On Palm Sunday....

The Jewish leaders couldn't risk more of that. So they were bidding their time...look for a clever way, to arrest Jesus. It's in that situation...**ugliness all around**....that the woman, Mary, does that very **beautiful** thing.

She shows her tender devotion to Jesus, and her affection for Him.

2. **Secondly**, the beautiful anointing of Jesus

can be **contrasted to the ugliness of the rebuking 训斥 disciples.**

It seems that the 12 disciples are with Jesus, in the home of Simon the leper. Mary is there,

obviously, probably her sister Martha, and brother Lazarus. Simon the healed leper 麻风病人 is there, perhaps with members of his extended family. And maybe others. Mostly, they are followers of Jesus.

Mary's beautiful action provokes a reaction, Mark tells us. [Read vss. 4-5.

It seems that this group of rebukers included even the 12 disciples. Look at what Jesus says

Later: "you (you, plural) will not always have me with you." Ah, later, the disciples and the larger group of followers would want Jesus with them, physically. But by then, they could not have him. In his glorified body Jesus would then be in heaven. At the right hand of the F. /

-Now, in his account of this same even, John tells us specifically that it was Judas who rebuked Mary. But, interestingly, Mark doesn't single Judas out. Judas is part of the larger group.

Why do some of the disciples and other followers think they were right in rebuking Mary?

Well, for those of us who come from a frugal 节俭 background, carefully watching our money, their rebuke makes some sense. We can even imagine ourselves maybe saying the same thing: "What a waste of money! Why, that perfume could have been sold for more than a year's wages. And the money could have been given to poor people." What a waste!

-You see, this is not just some cheap perfume, bought at Shoppers Drug St. This perfume was of highest quality. One scholar suggests that perfume like this could have been handed down, from parents and from grandparents. A valuable part of the estate. Think of it...the perfume costs a years worth of wages. What does a person make today, in a year?

Well depending.... Starting out, one can make \$25, 30, 35,000 on the lower end.

It's easy to see why most people would consider this a waste of money.

-Mark tells us it was an alabaster jar...alabaster, something like quartz, a vessel carved out, hollowed out. A jar all in one solid piece of alabaster. Jars like that didn't have corks to pull

out, to empty the contents. Mark tells us in vs. 3, this one-piece jar had to be broken apart, to pour out the perfume. So Mary didn't just use up a portion of that perfume....

instead, it all had to be used up, in that one moment. All of it was poured on Jesus' head. Nothing was left over. What a waste, it seems.

-It is in response to **those people**, rebuking Mary, that Jesus speaks so strongly.

"Leave her alone," he says, rebuking the rebukers. And He adds: "Why are you bothering her?" The words can be translated as: "why must you make trouble for her?"

Then, positively, Jesus declares: "She has done a beautiful thing to me."

Jesus understands the beauty of what Mary did. You see, he knows her heart, and her motives.

Remember, this Mary in the gospels...is portrayed as one of the most careful listeners to what Jesus was saying. What he was teaching. And she evidently had a faith that was as strong, at that point, or even stronger, than many of the 12 disciples.

Jesus says: "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." To prepare Jesus body. To be buried, meant he had to die. Mary, by faith, at that point seems to have understood more than the disciples. A couple of days later, in the upper room, Jesus would say to the Twelve that he must leave them. And Thomas said: "Lord we don't know where you are going." And Philip also expressed confusion./ Jesus also said: "Where I am going, you cannot follow now." And Peter responded by saying: "Why can't I follow you now?"

But Mary, in faith, as God's gift of grace to her, seems more able to understand. Out of faith, and out of deep love for her Saviour. Out of her faith and love she had poured out that perfume on his head. So what if it cost her a year's wages?

This Jesus is the Saviour of the world. This is the Messiah promised to their Jewish forefathers. This is the one who truly will save them from their sins. How much would you spend on Jesus? Especially in that moment...as in a couple of days, he will be mocked 被嘲笑 and ridiculed. Whipped and beaten and nailed to a cross. How much is too much, to acknowledge him and his death and burial. There will be time enough to give money to the poor. The poor we have with us, always. But Jesus, in the flesh, would only be with them a couple of days. And after his resurrection, there would be only another 6 weeks.

You see what a beautiful thing Mary did? Out of her faith, by God's grace, given to her?

Application: We today, stand on the other side of the cross, and the open grave.

The other side of Jesus resurrection 复活 from the dead, and his ascension to heaven. Surely, then, our response to Jesus must be as beautiful as that of Mary! What might that mean for us, to give a beautiful response, to our Saviour? To show our faith, our love, our devotion to our Saviour, who gave so much for us?

1) For some of us, it indeed might mean giving up a year's wages. Or even more than that...

Either in money, or in time, devoted to the gospel, to the work of the church.

Are we being too frugal, too careful with our money? Too much for ourselves?

Would we ever lavish expensive gifts upon Jesus and His church?

From this morning's sermon...."takers or givers." +

2) But this story isn't only about giving money...though it does apply there. It's also about giving of our hearts, our souls. Of loving our God, loving our Saviour Jesus, more and more.

How are you showing that you truly love your Saviour, Jesus? +

3. There is at least one more contrast in this story. Esp as Mark frames it in these 11 short verses. Mary's beautiful action stood 1) in contrast to the ugliness of the plotting, Jewish leaders. 2) Her beautiful action also stood in contrast to the ugliness of the rebuking disciples.

Now-[Read vs. 10-11.

Ah, the man Judas, one of the 12 disciples. He's the one who will betray Jesus.

Mark tells us at this point, having left the home of Simon the leper, now Judas starts talking to the priests on how to betray Jesus. **This event seems to be the tipping point, for Judas.**

If we turn to John's account, we learn more about Judas. [Read John 12: 5-6

Ah, Judas, actually, was only a pretender. A phony. A fake. Outwardly he looked like a disciple of Jesus. But inwardly, he refused to trust in Jesus.

Inwardly, he was full of himself...full of greed and coveting 贪图. He was a thief.

He stole money from the funds collected by J and the other disciples.

He stood against the faithful and loving act of Mary, out of hardness of heart.

Without love for God; without love for the poor...either.

He just spoke about the poor, without really caring for them. All he cared about, was himself.

He was a thief, full of love for himself, without any love for Jesus.

You see, then, how the beautiful action of Mary, stands out so clearly, as something beautiful.

With Judas there, protesting on behalf of the poor, but only a thief. Only loving himself?

Mary is truly giving of herself...giving one of the most precious things she owned. That very expensive jar of perfume. Judas? Judas, only wants to take...to take more for himself.

-In Psalm 41, David writes about someone one who pretended to be his close friend. In vs. 9 of

Psalm 41, David writes: "my close friend, whom I trusted, **he who shared my bread**, has lifted up his heel against me." "Lifted up his heel" that is, someone who betrayed him, who worked to destroy him.

David is also prophesying about his descendant, Jesus. Jesus had 12 closest friends.

There they were, at that dinner table, in the home of Simon the leper. Sharing together in that meal.

Later, Judas will share in the meal in the upper room. That Passover meal. That night Judas would go out, in the darkness of night, to plot Jesus' arrest. So J would be killed.

What spiritual darkness and ugliness is in the heart and the mind of Judas! Mark tells us at that point, right after that meal in Simon's house, he started to talk with the Jewish leaders.

How to arrest and kill Jesus.

What a contrast...to the beautiful, self-giving service of Mary! What a beautiful thing she did to J.

And Jesus said about her: Vs. 9. "I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached

throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Think of it!

Wherever the good news about Jesus has been preached, throughout the centuries, this beautiful action of Mary, has become known.

It's recorded in the gospel accounts—Mark records it; John records it.

Over the centuries preachers have preached this story. In tens of thousands of churches.

Over the centuries, missionaries have told the story, in countless far off lands.

That Mary loved her Saviour so much, that she in faith, in love, in adoration of her Saviour,

poured that expensive perfume upon Jesus. That it prepared Jesus, for his death and burial.

Mary's action was beautiful. Her memory is blessed. But Judas, his memory is accursed.

App! What do we leave behind? What will people recall about us, when we are gone?

No, we don't have the same opportunity as Mary did. No one today can do what she did.

But, think of it, we can leave behind a testimony of love and faithfulness to our Saviour Jesus.

No, none of us will be perfect; none of us will be perfect Christians; not even the best pastor, or best elder.

Each of us must cry out for the forgiveness of our sins, because of Jesus...because of his death on the cross, his burial in that tomb, his being resurrected on the third day.

But ...listen.... we can leave behind certain impressions, certain memories of good works in

helping others; good words of testifying about Jesus;

we can indeed truly help the poor in Jesus name—not just pretending to care;

we can indeed the hurting, the sad, the sorrowful;

We can encourage the new Christian...that young person who struggled for a while....

that newcomer to the church, who obviously has issues;

Like Mary, we can point people to our Saviour, the one we truly love, and truly adore.

That people can see we love him more than our money, more than our most expensive perfume, or house, or car....we love him, because He first loved us. **LET US PRAY.**