

Extravagant Love

Mark 14:1-9

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I enjoy smelling things...well, most things. When Beth and I end up in a store that has perfume and cologne testers, I like to try out the different aromas. When our girls were younger I'd often spray the back of their necks with the grossest smell I could find and then run before they could spray me back. Nice dad, right?

About a year ago when I was sniffing the scents, I came across some cologne that stopped me in my tracks. I sprayed some on the back of my hand and held it up to Beth's nose to let her know I liked it. I then sprayed it on my other hand because I liked it so much and gave her another whiff. I reminded her that Christmas was coming and made sure to show her what the packaging looked like and that the name was "Energized." I didn't even look at the price.

When Christmas came my extravagant expectations were realized. I used this cologne for an entire year, being careful to make it last as long as I could. It's now gone so I no longer feel energized.

I didn't realize how expensive it was to be energized until I looked it up recently. Now I know why I didn't get another bottle this year!

Perfume can be pricey. The most expensive is called *Golden Delicious* and sold for \$1 million! Another one called *Imperial Majesty* lists for almost \$500,000. Perfume costs a lot for two reasons.

- **The ingredients are hard to find and difficult to extract.** One of the most expensive ingredients is a secretion produced in the digestive system of certain types of whales. Another is a fragrant resin that is emitted as a defense mechanism to starve mold infection on the most expensive wood in the world. Think about this the next time you spray some scent on your body.
- **The container or packaging can cause the price to skyrocket.** The bottle that holds *Golden Delicious* contains 2,909 precious stones, including diamonds and rubies. It took a total of 1,500 hours to hand-place each stone to form the skyline of New York City.

In Mark 14 we'll meet a woman who demonstrated her commitment to Christ by breaking an expensive container and pouring an extravagant amount of ointment on Jesus.

But first let's get our bearings as we return again to our verse-by-verse study of Mark's record of the life of Jesus. We've been learning that Jesus is both Servant and Savior. Mark 10:45 serves as the theme verse: ***“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*** In the first part of the book we've seen Jesus as Servant and in the final chapters we're moving quickly to the cross where we will see Him as Savior.

Verses 1-2 provide the setting: ***“It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.’”*** Jerusalem was filled with people celebrating Passover, which memorializes how God spared Israel while striking Egypt's firstborn sons. The Feast of Unleavened Bread recalls Israel's exodus from Egypt. In the midst of the religious celebration, the religious leaders are scheming how to arrest Jesus without causing a commotion among the people.

Listen now to Mark 14:3-9: ***“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. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, ‘Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.’ And they scolded her. But Jesus said, ‘Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 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. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. 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.’”***

We'll use this outline to follow the natural flow of the text:

1. Commitment demonstrated (3)
2. Criticism delivered (4-5)
3. Commendation described (6-9)

Verse 8 provides the main point of the passage: ***“She has done what she could...”***
We could say it like this: *Do all you can with all you have.*

1. Commitment demonstrated. Look at verse 3: ***“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.”*** Bethany was the hometown of Lazarus, Martha and Mary and was only a few miles from Jerusalem. Their home was like a Bed and Breakfast for Jesus during the last week of his life.

Jesus is having supper with ***“Simon the leper.”*** We don’t know much about him but we can surmise that Jesus had healed him because if he still had leprosy he would not have been allowed around people. It’s likely that Lazarus, who was raised from the dead about a month earlier, was also there. Can you imagine the rejoicing going on from Simon who had been cleansed from leprosy and from Lazarus who had a new lease on life?

The phrase, ***“reclining at table”*** reminds us that they didn’t sit in chairs like we do but rather would stretch out on their sides with their head near the table and their feet pointing away. I wonder if we should try this at the Second Winders luncheon next month?

We then read, ***“a woman came...”*** This interruption to the meal would have been against Jewish protocol. Mark doesn’t identify her because he puts the focus not on who she is, but on what she did. We know from John 12:3 that her name is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Interestingly, in the two other passages where Mary is mentioned, she’s seen worshipping at the feet of Jesus.

- In Luke 10:38-42, we learn that because Martha ***“was distracted with much serving,”*** she asks Jesus to get Mary to help her. Jesus corrects her hurried and harried heart while celebrating Mary’s undivided devotion. While Martha is working, Mary is worshipping as she: ***“sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.”***
- In John 11:32, after their brother Lazarus died, the two sisters are grieving and want to know why Jesus hadn’t come sooner. It’s interesting that while Martha greets Jesus respectfully, Mary worships Him reverently: ***“Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet...”***

There's been some confusion about the identity of this worshipping woman because there's another woman who anoints Jesus with expensive ointment during a meal. While the parallel accounts in Matthew 26:6-13, John 12:1-8 and Mark 14:3-9, describe the actions of Mary in the house of Simon the Leper, Luke 7:36-50 speaks of a different woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee. What happens there takes place a year before the crucifixion in the area around Galilee. In addition, the woman in Luke 7 is identified as ***"a woman of the city, who was a sinner."*** Jesus ends up forgiving her for ***"her many sins."***

The main reason for the confusion is that both of these women come to Jesus with ***"an alabaster flask."*** Alabaster was an expensive and hard stone imported from Egypt that resembled white marble and was used to decorate Solomon's Temple in 1 Chronicles 29:2. In Song of Songs 5:15, Solomon is described as having legs ***"as alabaster columns."*** He must have done squats on a regular basis!

Alabaster had the ability to keep perfumed oil pure and unspoiled. The top of the flask had a long thin neck that was often sealed up with wax so the ointment wouldn't evaporate or spill out. Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century, noted that the ***"best ointment is preserved in alabaster."***

According to John 12:3, this alabaster flask held about a pound ***"of ointment of pure nard."*** This was not some knockoff nard from Dollar Tree. It was perfectly pure, which was why it cost so much. Nard, or spikenard, was fragrant oil made from the root of an extremely rare plant that was imported from the banks of the Ganges River in India.

This nard was known to be very fragrant as seen in Song of Songs 1:12: ***"While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance."*** And this nard was ***"very costly,"*** which means, ***"precious, excellent, of surpassing value."*** Drop down to verse 5 to discover that this nard was worth more than 300 denarii. A denarius was the daily wage for a worker. Since the average laborer worked six days a week, with time off for festivals, that comes to around 300 days a year. To put this in perspective, think about what you make in a year. Once you have that figure in your mind, imagine giving that amount as an extravagant expression of worship to Christ. Mary came with this priceless treasure and gave it all in devotion to Jesus.

Mary ***"broke the flask and poured it over his head."*** The word for ***"broke"*** means, ***"to crush and break in pieces."*** There was no going back after breaking

the bottle. Her commitment to Christ was unconditional and complete. In a similar way, we must understand what it means to be broken and fully surrendered before the Lord. God is looking for us to stop skating on the surface of spiritual superficiality and to give our all for the One who gave His all for us. It's time for us to move from casual Christianity to convictional Christianity, from duty to delight and from obligation to opportunity because true love is always extravagant.

Far too many of us are like the guy who called up his girlfriend and said, "*Darling, I love you! I would climb the highest mountain for you! I would swim the deepest river for you! I would fight a jungle full of lions for you! I love you with all that I have. And if it doesn't rain tonight, I'll be over to see you.*"

When the flask was broken, the room would have filled with the fragrance of this expensive oil. When she poured it over His head she was treating Jesus as royalty. Oil was used to anoint kings, prophets and priests in the Old Testament. Psalm 23:5 describes how God anoints David's head with oil as an expression of His unconditional love. It was common in those days to put a few drops of perfume on the head of an honored guest but Mary poured out every drop on Jesus! John 12:3 says that she also poured this perfume all over his feet. Only slaves washed the feet of others. Instead of using a towel to dry his feet, she used her hair.

It's helpful to consider how Mary might have obtained this expensive ointment and what she was saving it for. Perhaps the perfume was an heirloom, handed down to her from a relative. Nard was used for two primary purposes.

- **A dowry to be presented to her husband.** By breaking the bottle and pouring it all out on Jesus, she was giving up her security and putting her future in His hands. Here's something to ponder...since Jesus is referred to as the groom and Christians as His bride, she is symbolizing her unconditional commitment to Christ. She's giving up all her dreams to the One who gave His all for her. *She's doing all she can with all she has.*
- **An oil to be used to anoint a body before burial.** Perhaps she was saving this perfume for her own funeral because nard was also used as part of the embalming process. By pouring the ointment on Christ, she was entrusting her death to the One who would die in her place. There was another custom that after the body of the deceased had been washed and anointed, the bottle that contained the perfumed spices was broken and the fragments were to be buried with the body.

This perfume was precious to Mary and costly beyond price and her actions affected her financially, emotionally, psychologically and socially. She gave an extravagant amount of oil to the One who gave His life so she could have life.

Her expression could be called crazy and even radical. But in her mind she was simply living out what the Apostle Paul described in 2 Timothy 4:6: ***“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”***

In what ways are you and I demonstrating our commitment to Christ in extravagant ways? What is God asking you to do that might be considered radical or even reckless? Is there something you can do that only you can do? Remember, God doesn't expect equal gifts but He does expect equal sacrifice. Mary gave something of great value while the widow contributed her last two coins. *Do all you can with all you have.*

When Mary went full-fanatic, the other followers of Jesus filleted her. That leads to our second point.

2. Criticism delivered. Here's the principle: *If you fully live out your faith in extravagant ways, other believers may blast away at you.*

I'll never forget working in a factory during the summer months when I was in college. For the first week I worked hard and didn't take breaks, even eating lunch standing up while continuing my assigned task. At the end of the week a number of guys sat me down and told me to slow down. When I asked them why they said it was making them look bad. In case you think more of me than I deserve I should tell you that my dad was the foreman at the factory. I knew if I slacked off I would hear about it at home.

Something similar was happening with the disciples. When confronted by Mary's extravagant worship they wound up and let her have it in verse 4: ***“There were some who said to themselves indignantly, ‘Why was the ointment wasted like that?’”*** We know from John 12:4 that Judas is the spokesman who stirred things up.

The word ***“indignantly”*** means *“to have great anger and fury, to be grieved, sorely vexed and very displeased.”* While Mary worshipped, they want to know why the ointment was wasted. Their question can be translated, *“To what purpose*

*this destruction?” Ironically, this word is used in John 17:12 when Jesus calls Judas the **“son of destruction.”** Judas criticized Mary for wasting money while he ended up wasting his life! Because he didn’t get anything out of what Mary did he was upset. He felt left out, so he lashed out. Get this, church: *Nothing you ever give to God is wasted!**

Verse 5 is really a spiritual smokescreen: **“For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.’ And they scolded her.”** We know from John 12:6 that Judas wasn’t concerned about helping the poor: **“He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”** Instead of celebrating Mary’s expression of extravagant love, they **“scolded her.”** This word is quite strong as it referred to the snorting of a horse.

Pastor Ed told me about a man who came into the lobby before a recent service and stopped at the counter in the back where we have our offering envelopes. He had some family members with him, including a girl about 12 years old. He pulled out a check and started filling it in. The young girl saw the dollar amount and said, *“You’re going to give that much money to the church?”* He responded, *“Oh yeah, you always have to give God His due.”*

Beth reminded me of something that happened to us over 30 years ago. We had written out our budget by hand and had inadvertently left it on the table when one of my sisters visited. She looked at our budget categories and asked what “CMC” stood for. We told her that was Calvary Memorial Church and explained that we give 10% to our church. My sister exclaimed, *“I’d never be able to give that much!”*

Actually, we don’t see tithing as sacrificial or extravagant but simply a starting point as we joyfully give over and above to missionaries and other ministries. As I pray about our upcoming capital campaign for our facility expansion and renovation project, I’m asking God to help us give extravagantly to the space God has entrusted Edgewood for greatest possible ministry impact. Would you join me in praying this for yourself?

When I think of extravagant worship, I remember David dancing exuberantly before the Lord in 2 Samuel 6. We read in verse 14 that **“he danced before the Lord with all his might.”** Shouts, songs, harps, lyres, trumpets and cymbals created a cacophony of sound. I’ve been pondering a question – do I sing with all

my might? Do I live my life for Christ with all my might? His wife criticized David for his unbridled worship but he didn't stop as seen in verse 21: ***"I will celebrate before the LORD."***

Sometimes we don't want to get too fanatical in our faith because we're worried that people might criticize us. I like how Alistair Begg defines a fanatic: "*A fanatic is someone who loves Jesus more than I do.*" We must be careful about not criticizing someone who is living out their commitment in expressive, extravagant and expensive ways. Have you ever wondered why we celebrate someone's devotion to a sports team but dismiss a person's radical faith as fanaticism?

We've seen *commitment demonstrated* and we've heard *criticism delivered*. When you *do all you can with all you have*, Jesus will *commend* you.

3. Commendation described. I love how Jesus comes to the defense of Mary in verse 6: ***"But Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing.'"*** The word ***"but"*** indicates a contrast between their criticism and His commendation. ***"Leave her alone"*** is a sharp rebuke in the aorist imperative, which is a command with great urgency. Don't miss that Jesus knew exactly what the disciples were saying, even though verse 4 indicates that they ***"said to themselves."*** That had to be disarming to have their griping and gossiping exposed like that. Remember that Jesus knows everything we say and everything we think.

Jesus defends and commends her for doing a ***"beautiful thing."*** This word has a multifaceted meaning: *"noble, excellent, good, complete, useful and suitable."*

Jesus drives home the lesson in verse 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."*** Jesus is not prohibiting helping the poor because He's actually quoting a portion of Deuteronomy 15:11. Listen to the whole verse: ***"For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'"***

He's not pitting himself against the poor but rather is calling out their unholy hypocrisy. Mary simply seized the moment and took the opportunity she had to show her love to the Lord.

The “*me*” at the end of verse 7 is emphatic: “***But Me, you do not always have.***” This shows that the spiritual must always take precedence over the social. It’s not about the social gospel; it’s all about the gospel that changes society. Actually, if we love Jesus we will love the little, the least and the lost because true love for Christ always leads us to do something for Christ. 1 John 3:17: “***But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?***” In Luke 14:13, Jesus says: “***But when you give a banquet, invite the poor.***”

I love that Moody Radio and One Eighty, two our Go Team partners, are working together to provide Winter Rescue Kits for people in need in the Quad Cities area. A gift of \$25 will provide for one person and includes items like a hot meal, shelter, blankets, clothes, hats, gloves and toiletry items. I included a link on the Sermon Extras page and on the Edgewood Facebook page if you want to participate. As of Friday, over 500 kits have been purchased! Let’s see if we can get to 600 after this weekend.

Remember too that the preaching of the gospel is the ultimate good news for the poor as Jesus announced in Luke 4:18: “***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.***”

Look at verse 8: “***She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.***” Mary did what she could or as it’s literally translated, “*what she had, she did.*” She couldn’t do everything but what she could do, she did. *Since no one can do everything, but everyone can do something, do all you can with all you have.*

We’re not all given the same health or wealth, the same gifts, abilities, personality or passion. But we can give what we have. Remember that God never holds us responsible for what we don’t have.

Mary recognized the worth of the Savior and somehow understood what He was about to do as Substitute for her sins. Jesus repeatedly told the disciples about His upcoming death but they never seemed to get it. While Mary poured out something of great value, in Mark 14:24 Jesus describes something of infinite value that will be poured out: “***This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.***”

What Mary did will always be linked to the preaching of the gospel as we see in verse 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.***” Jesus again describes the gospel as for the “***whole world.***” Notice that the commendation of Christ reminds us that we are never fully aware of our own significance or role in God’s kingdom. True worship affects others – not just how we sing but how we serve. Mary had no idea of the worldwide significance of her action that has been impacting believers for over 2,000 years. Talk about leaving a legacy! I want to leave a legacy as a dad and as a grandpa and am looking forward to learning more about how to do that at the Legacy Grandparenting Conference here on February 24.

Let’s summarize where we’ve been. *Do all you can with all you have.*

- 1. Commitment demonstrated (3)**
- 2. Criticism delivered (4-5)**
- 3. Commendation described (6-9)**

We could form this into one sentence. When you demonstrate your commitment to Christ, you will likely be criticized but you can count on the commendation of Christ Himself. What Mary did is to be applauded and emulated because you will be blessed when you give God your best! People will know the Lord has changed your life by how you live and by how you give.

Application

Have you ever heard of Air Smell-it-zers? They’re named after Howitzers, only they emit smells, not shells. Disney uses them at their parks. If you’re on Main Street you’ll notice the scent of baking cookies and vanilla. If you stand in line for Pirates of the Caribbean, you’ll smell salty sea air and you’ll catch a scent of honey on Winnie the Pooh’s Adventure.

The smell-it-zer operates like an air cannon, aiming the scent up to 200 feet across a room toward an exhaust system. Guests traveling on moving vehicles pass through the scene as the appropriate scent drifts across their path. Regulated by computer, these smells can be launched just prior to each vehicle’s arrival.

John 12:3 says that after Mary anointed Jesus, “***The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***” There’s always a spiritual fragrance in the home and

in hearts where Jesus is loved and worshipped. So here's a question. What kind of smell are you emitting? 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 says: "***For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?***"

If you're a born again believer, you carry the aroma of Christ! To those who are far from Christ, like Judas, you're a fragrance of death. But to those who are saved, you have a sweet smell that leads to life.

The key is for us to be fully and completely surrendered to Christ. We won't be energized or smell very good until we are.

Would you stand as we sing this closing song of surrender? I heard a pastor once say that 95% commitment to Christ is still 5% short. Settle your surrender to the Savior right now.

Closing Song: "Take My Life"

*Take my life and let it be consecrated
Lord to Thee
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise
Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee*

Welcome New Members