

Sermon for Ash Wednesday

Date: February 26, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Joel 2:12-19

Epistle Reading: 2 Peter 1:2-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

Passion Reading: Mark 14:1-9

Sermon Text: Mark 14:1-9

Sermon Title: Misjudging Eyes



Hymns:

LSB 419 – Savior, When in Dust to Thee (v. 1,4)

LSB 418 – O Lord, Through These Forty Days (v. 1,4)

CW – Our Eyes Behold the Savior's Face (v. 1,4,5)

LSB 607 – From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee (v.1,4,5)

LSB 788 – Forgive Us, Lord, for Shallow Thankfulness (v.1,6)

LSB 798 – The God of Abraham Praise (v. 6,8)

LSB 345 – Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding (v. 3,5)

LSB 937 – Lord, Bid Your Servant Go in Peace

LSB 744 – Amazing Grace

Distribution:

W&P 23 – Broken for Me

LSB 608 – Lord, to You I Make Confession

Imposition of Ashes:

LSB 611 – Chief of Sinners Though I Be

W&P 65 – How Can I Be Free From Sin

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



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Text: Mark 14:1-9

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.”

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 {*de-NAR-eye*} 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.”

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Some of you might remember the song:

I can see clearly now the rain is gone.
I can see all obstacles in my way.
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind.
It's gon'na be a bright bright sun-shiny day.



If you get ashes in your eyes you can't see clearly. Our inherent sinfulness is like ashes to our spiritual vision. We look at what is good and distort its purpose, or we look on what is beautiful and misjudge its value.

Jesus says in the Gospel, “When you give to the needy.”¹ He assumes that Christians will give to the needy. Jesus also says in the Passion Reading,

“You always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them.”²

But sinners misjudge the purpose of such good deeds.

Jesus criticized the hypocrites “in the synagogues and in the streets” for making as big show of giving to the needy to “be praised by others.”³ He says they also prayed long-winded prayers and made a show of fasting to “be seen by others.”⁴ In being praised and seen by others, they received the rewards they were seeking: to be held in high esteem by other people. Which is self-serving and godless. It is not the good works God has prepared for us to do,⁵ because it pays no thought to our Father in heaven.

Those, however, who come to the Father through faith in Jesus view good works as opportunities to serve our neighbor and please God.⁶ They are not seeking a reward, they are giving one. Jesus promises that the Father will reward the giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting of His children, but reward for the good work is not the reason for the good work. Your motivation matters.

People so severely misjudges this point. Satan's seduction is that good works must be done to be rewarded with eternal life. That is what Satan does. He twists God's Word and God's love into policy not peace, regulation not rest, procedure not praise for God.

Thanks be to God that His Word makes profoundly clear our wretchedness and desperate need for the forgiveness. What we need most is not to give to the needy

1 Matthew 6:2

2 Mark 14:7

3 Matthew 6:2

4 Matthew 6:5, 16

5 Ephesians 2:10

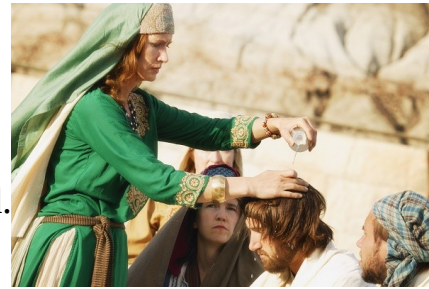
6 2 Corinthians 5:9

or any other good work. We need the Lamb of God to take away our sins.⁷ those who hold themselves up as the better example, are the most satanic among us. Listen to the Holy Word of God.

It was now two days before the Passover... And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest Him by stealth and kill Him.⁷

Keeping our eyes on Jesus is what everything we do in this season of Lent is about. We need to watch Him, learn from Him, mimic Him. Today we watch Jesus at Simon's dinner party.

The guests at Simon's dinner party did not have their mind or hearts in the right place, when an uninvited woman barges in, brakes open a jar of very expensive perfume, and pours it on Jesus' head. The images we see in the movies tend to show this as something peacefully done, with sentimental serenity and ceremony. The words in the Bible actually show a suddenness and clumsiness to what she did.



Alabaster flasks were not cheap, but she smashed it open. That's not an act of slow deliberateness. It's an act of desperation, of getting it done before someone stops her. It isn't slowly pouring it on Jesus' head but drenching Him in it, as the aroma fills the room.

Then there's the value of the contents, which was worth about a years wages. Just imagine how many people you could feed! That's what the guests at Simon's dinner were saying, outraged at the woman's wastefulness, saying so many would go hungry because of her impulsiveness.

“What's wrong with you, woman? Are you out of your mind? You should have sold that perfume and given the money to the poor!” They had **misjudging eyes.**

Jesus, of course, always sees clearly. He comes to the woman's defense and tells her critics to back off. Jesus sees her heart, not her clumsy, unceremonious, action. He sees the beautiful work for what it is, preparation for the most beautiful, noble, good deed in all of human history. Preparation for His suffering, death, and burial. It's good to do good, to feed the hungry, but when Jesus, the Holy Christ of God, is sitting at your table, preparing to suffer and die for the sin of the world in a couple of days, maybe a year's wages worth of ointment is not such a waste.

In just a few days Jesus would be hanging on a cross. It's not something that would naturally come to mind, as we approach Good Friday, but one might

⁷ Mark 14:1

wander: As the sweat and blood poured down Jesus' face, could He still smell the perfume that had been poured on His head for His burial? Did it linger? The Bible tells us:

Christ loved us, and gave Himself up for us.
A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.⁸

What about us? Have we been anointed? Have you been Baptized? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb to sanctify you, make you holy, make you pleasing to your heavenly Father. The beautiful robe of Christ's righteousness has become yours. The power of sin, death, and Satan has been shattered like an alabaster flask, and you have been set free from the dungeon of darkness to live forever in the Kingdom of Life.

That is what this nameless woman was doing, anointing Jesus. Her motivation has to have been faith in Jesus, and love for Him. We know this because Jesus who judges the heart, and not by what eyes see,⁹ says:

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.¹⁰

The Gospel, the Good News, is always about forgiveness of sins being received in faith. Though we don't know her name now, we will some day, by faith. Because of your faith in the same One in whom she had faith. Through Jesus you have the opportunity to make her acquaintance some day; to ask her what it was like that day.

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There was another time when Jesus was anointed by a woman. It was much earlier in His ministry, at the house of a Pharisee named Simon.¹¹ Scripture says that woman was known around town. Not to put too fine a point on it, but she was a hooker, a prostitute. The kind of person some might think would need to be cleansed from the church. One of those unforgivables. One those beyond God's grace.



It's perhaps easy to go there ourselves, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus, if we

8 Ephesians 5:2
9 1 Samuel 16:7
10 Mark 14:9
11 Luke 7:36-50

close our **misjudging eyes**, and keep our eyes on Jesus, what do we see? What did Jesus think of her? What did Jesus think of those who watched her?

In Luke chapter seven you can read all about it. It says she anointed Jesus' feet, and dried them with her hair. Then Jesus says that her loving action toward Him was evidence that she had been forgiven much. She had been forgiven. Her. That kind of woman. Probably a home-wrecker. A seducer. The kind of woman who connives and convinces men to abandon their wives and children. She had been forgiven. Her name was Mary. She was from a town called Magdalene. She was the first person to see Jesus alive that early Sunday morning¹² that celebrate, remember, and call Resurrection Sunday – Easter.

Where have you been? What have you done? What have you seen?

From whom does our help come?
Our help comes from the Lord.
The maker of heaven and earth.¹³

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Why does Scripture not give this woman's name? This woman who anointed Jesus for burial. Because at that moment she was not the point. Jesus, and His saving work was. Her anonymous nature teaches us how to approach good works. Not for notoriety, but rather "not allowing your left hand to know what your right hand is doing."¹⁴

You are called to do what you can where you are, in whatever situation the Lord puts you each day. You are set free from your own **misjudging eyes** and the enslaving **misjudging eyes** of others. In Christ, you receive temporal and eternal rewards, that you could never earn, by grace alone.¹⁵

That takes all the pressure off you, and places you under His easy yoke and light burden.¹⁶ So on this Ash Wednesday repent, and believe the Gospel. Rejoice that you have been judged forgiven, and marked righteous in the eyes of the One who judges justly, and sees clearly.

Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Amen.

12 John 20:1-16

13 Psalm 121:1-2

14 Matthew 6:3-4

15 Ephesians 2:8

16 Matthew 11:28-30