

**“Jesus is satisfied with our best gift.”**

John 12:1-8, Mark 14:3-8

**Prayer**

To the God who delights in what we have to give, to the God who covers us when many speak against us – we thank you for this preaching moment. May something be said to remind us of your satisfaction with our gifts. May something be said so that we are never fearful to bring you what we have. In the name of the one who died and rose again. Amen.

There is a lot that goes into planning a dinner with guests. One may want to bring out fine China, adorn the table with a beautiful tablecloth, or they may want to make a great family recipe. Whatever you do or however you plan for dinner with guests at your house, I am sure we can agree when we say, dinner, especially Sunday dinner, is a big deal. Food is a way to communicate love, respect, and share cultural customs.

Aside from what the menu at dinner will be or who will be invited to dinner, it goes without saying that if someone is inviting you to their home then it is never appropriate to come empty-handed. We should always bring some type of gift – showing up with something is a sign of honor and appreciation. One should always ask, is there anything I can bring? Do you need me to stop by the store and pick something up? If the answer is no, one may still wish to bring something. It could be a bottle of wine, a movie to watch after dinner, or even a fun game to play while food is still being prepared. We know who to invite to our home and who not to invite to our home from this simple rule of showing up with a gift. If the person who is listening may not be the best chef and they always ask you to bring ice or utensils, you are still bringing something. That's what matters.

In our text, Mary and Martha are preparing dinner for Jesus who is the invited guest. For those who don't know the story, Mary and Martha are in a celebratory mood. Why? Because Jesus has raised their brother, Lazarus, from the dead which means this is no ordinary party – Mary and Martha have every reason to go all out. Think of a party with ice sculptures, an orchestra, an open bar, a celebrity guest list – it is THAT kind of party.

Now at this lavish, grand celebration, Mary does something that is very strange. She does something for the one who came empty-handed. She does something for the guest who did not bring anything to the party. Jesus came empty-handed because he, along with Lazarus, can be considered the guests of honor. With this information, let's think about how we would treat our guests of honor? What would we want them to experience at a party that is for them? Again, Mary does something that is very strange. She takes an expensive fragrance and uses it to anoint the feet of Jesus — the invited guest. I don't know about y'all, but I would not be pleased if I were at an extravagant party, and all of a sudden, the room begins to smell like feet. I would be disturbed.

However, we see this act or this gift offering that Mary does for Jesus other times throughout scripture. In Mark chapter 14, which was read, a woman pours ointment on the head of Jesus and as this woman is being scolded, Jesus says “leave her alone, she did what she could”. The costly oil or the fragrance was something that these women found to be of value to them. For the

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woman in Mark 14, this was all she had to give to Jesus, and for Mary, in John 12, this was her best offering for Jesus. The fragrance, the oil used by these women to anoint Jesus, was so valuable that men questioned these women and said “why is she using this expensive oil? She must be out of her mind”. This is very similar to when someone may bring an expensive bottle of wine to the party and they may hear “oh, you did not have to go through this trouble”.

The text does a lovely job of telling us about the many folks in the room.

First, we have Judas who was very upset with Mary. We know Judas. Judas questioned Mary by asking ““why was the perfume not sold for its worth?”. Judas may be among us this morning or viewing online. Judas is one who shows up to the party empty handed but has a lot of complaints to make. If the food is cold at the party, Judas is going to complain. If the wine is not chilled enough for Judas, he will complain. Judas may be a loving in-law who pushes too many of your buttons or the co-worker who has nothing but negative energy. The beautiful thing from our text is that Jesus silences Judas. After Judas criticizes what Mary does at the party, Jesus says leave her alone. Mary was not concerned with what Judas had to say because Jesus was in her presence. Jesus was satisfied with what she had done. She did not allow the negativity of Judas to stop her desire to give a gift to Jesus.

While the text does not imply that Mary was bothered by what Judas had to say, we still must sit with the fact that this woman was under scrutiny. Let’s recap for a moment. Mary and Martha hosted a party for Jesus and Lazarus and Judas is upset as he’s probably trying to eat his salad before the main course, and he sees Jesus’ feet in his view and then all fingers point to Mary. It’s quite peculiar because why is the party host, Mary, being questioned for bringing a gift to the guest of honor? The woman in the room who has brought the best gift and is hosting the party is being questioned? I, too, am asking these questions.

In John 12 and Mark 14, inform us that both women are being scolded. Mary for her best gift and the woman in Mark for bringing her last to Jesus. If I can use my imagination, I would like for you to journey with me for a moment as we consider the women in our text. Let us consider the Marys and the woman in Mark 14. Maybe we are Mary. Maybe we are the woman described in Mark 14. How might this be so? Because we know what it is like to be criticized, we know what it is like to bring what we have or bring our best and it still is not good enough. For some in the room, you may know the saying “you did well – for a woman”. These women could be unqualified in the eyes of society. It could be because of their Blackness. Mary could be the queer woman that we overlook or the disabled person that we consistently ignore. The woman in Mark 14 probably did not come from the best family and feels as though she is not worthy, but both of these women are worthy in the eyes of Jesus because he is satisfied with their gift. Jesus finds satisfaction in what they have to bring to him. Mary brings her best and the woman in Mark 14 brings all that she has left and Jesus is still satisfied.

In this preaching moment, I want to speak to those who identify with the women in the room. Those who are giving their best gift or giving all that they have. From both texts, John 12 and Mark 14, we know that Jesus desires what is of most value to us. If you’re Mary, it may be your expensive fragrance [or your PS5 or your fancy sports car]. If you are the woman detailed in Mark, what’s valuable to you may be your last which is all you have to give. We don’t have to

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say “Lord, this is all I have left” because truth be told some of us have already given too much of ourselves and we are running on E, but we can look at the woman in Mark 14 and say “God, I don’t have much left, but I am going to trust you with what matters most to me” and that is what she did when she poured the fragrance on the head of Jesus. Through the women offering these gifts to Jesus, they are teaching us to say, “God even while my identities seem invaluable to the world, I know that they are valuable to you”.

What I love about the text presented to us today is that amidst the women being criticized and questioned, Jesus honored their gift. He honored their gift and silenced the noise of negativity around them. In John 12, Jesus says, “leave her alone” and in Mark 14, he says “leave her alone because she has done what she could”.

In this Lenten season as we are giving up things, we must remember that what we are offering to God is good enough. Whether it is our best or we simply offer what we can, that is good enough and that is what will satisfy Jesus. I want to encourage you to bring what is of value to you and lay it at the feet of Jesus. There may be people criticizing what you have to bring but bring what is most precious to you. If you’re like the woman in Mark 14 and you’re giving all you can, bring that too. Bring the parts of you that bring you shame, the parts of you that you are proud of, the parts of you that cause people to speak ill against you. Jesus is satisfied with what we have to give.

The beautiful thing about being in the presence of Jesus or even at the party where Jesus is, I don’t have to think twice about man’s approval, I don’t have to think about the dish that I wanted to bring. I only have to think about how satisfied Jesus will be when I bring what is most valuable to me. That is the good news, friends. The one who died and rose again will be satisfied with what we have to give.

If you are thinking to yourself, “well, I do not have much to give” – that’s okay. Bring that to Jesus. Our little becomes much in the presence of Jesus. I will even say that our little is enough in the presence of Jesus. Mary was in a position to throw the best party in honor of Jesus and Lazarus, but I know that if I can’t throw Jesus the most elaborate party then I can give Jesus what I have. I don’t have to lay out my fine China or be the best chef for Jesus.

What I must do is consider the Mary’s and the women in Mark 14 of the world. Consider the outcasts, those who are under scrutiny for their identities like our Black single mothers, our trans siblings, our poor siblings – we must consider the marginalized and we must consider Jesus. Whether you are Mary who can bring and give your best or you are the woman outlined in Mark 14 who gives what you have that is of most value to you – Jesus is satisfied with your gift. Jesus is satisfied with what you have to give.

Amen.