

Mark 14:3-9

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.'

And they scolded her.

But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.'

She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.'

A woman appears, as if out of nowhere.

Though we remember her and tell her story, she remains nameless, which is fitting in its own way, for the story we tell to remember her fits the lives of others who add beauty to our lives, who are known for doing the best they can, and who like her upset those who think she should pipe down and stay in her place.

The story, Jesus says, will be told in memory of her for as long as the good news is preached.

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts this day, be pleasing in your sight, O Lord our God, our Rock, our Redeemer, our Comforter. Amen.

Before the advent of screw-on caps for jars and bottles, costly perfumes and ointments were put in sealed glass containers, the glass container could be safely broken open but could not be resealed and the aroma could not be contained.

And to those there that day, it smelled like death and memory, for perfume such as the nameless woman breaks open was used to anoint bodies laying in family tombs, the perfume strong enough to overpower the smell of death, allowing families to visit their beloved as long as the perfume allowed.

The aroma of the perfume emanating the room causes many to remember their own beloved, their own grief; some respond with anger and scold her, they say, for squandering money, and in this way they cover their own grief with self-righteous judgment of her; in this way, they seek to hide their own vulnerability by exposing hers.

‘Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’

The smell of the perfume working into their clothes, their hair, their memory, impossible to escape, too strong to avoid, unasked for, uninvited.

But Jesus praises her.

She has done a beautiful thing to me. ... She has done what she could.

She has done a beautiful thing to me, he says, She has done what she could, he says

The stories we heard today and the stories we tell in the days ahead, are of stories beautiful things, the ways Erin was extravagant with herself and those she loved, totally engaged in everything she did, appearing as if from out of nowhere, not waiting for later, not holding back, but breaking open what she had to give and looking in her own way to anoint us, to add beauty to our lives.

Jesus praises the woman who breaks open her bottle of perfume to help us see the extravagant gift of good souls such as Erin, who ceaselessly do all they can, and refuse to slow down and wait for a better time later, who erupt onto the scene and disturb polite people who are too upset or too embarrassed or too disturbed by her extravagance to see her beauty as God sees it, as we whose eyes are open by love are able ourselves to see it.

Erin was an extravagant soul who loved beautiful things, a cat purring, voices united in song, dew on a spider's web, the foggy mist over wetlands in fall as the weather cools, the silence of a night blanketed by snow,

And then there were all those ways she did little thoughtful, unexpected things, personal loving things, that those who she loved remember now, and which cling to memory the way perfume clings to clothes, a blessing, an anointing.

We have also to look at those who scold the woman for her extravagance, who see her beauty as wasted, who are perhaps embarrassed because she upsets their sense of order or what is right, but we might see these people with a degree of compassion, because, after all, the woman reminds them of their own griefs, their own losses, and rather than see her beauty and extravagance as a gift, they feel exposed by it, made vulnerable by it, and so they close their hearts and minds to the good news Jesus preaches and we celebrate when we open our hearts to beautiful souls such as Erin Mackay Harvey Blasinski.

Jesus says:

She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.'

I am sorry our numbers have to be so limited today, because I have been hearing stories of Erin from the members of the church, and I know they are all praying for you gathered here today, Erin's closest family and friends.

I am quite sure our choir would have loved to sing for you, and our people would have loved to prepare a meal for you all so we could sit together and share stories of Erin's beautiful way of doing the best she could.

And I know for sure we are aching to hug and hold one another here today, and that the congregation grieves with you, and longs to be able to express its love for you and Erin.

There is in the grief of this day, a sense of regret, of what could have been, of what is being missed.

But there is beauty here today, in this moment in time, on this brisk day outside at Erin's family home, accompanied by the sound of cars at the new stop sign, but also by the sounds of birds and surrounded by the landscape that formed her and shaped her lovely soul.

Wherever the gospel is preached in the **whole world**, what she has done will be told in memory of her.'

This is that **wherever**, and this is part of God's **world**, and we tell stories in memory of Erin, and the body of people who loved her and were loved by her, the church body who cannot join with us physically today, this body of people who loved her and raised her up when she was a little girl and celebrated her and took care of her, this body is anointed beforehand and prepared for this day;

Like a perfume it pervades, it clings to us, it reminds us

It reminds us of the power of love, too strong to avoid, inescapable, unbidden and uninvited, and yet pervading and enduring; we are all vulnerable to it, we all connected by it.

This is what we remember, and this is how the gospel is preached, as we remember her, as we open our hearts to the power and beauty of love, as we accept that Erin did what she could do, and so did we.

This is the good news friends, and this is the gospel.

God saw only beauty in Erin's life, and God welcomes her into eternal beauty with the glorious company of Saints in Light, for she did all that she could do, and so did we.

And as you, Erin's closest family and friends do what you can do in the coming days, the beauty of God will surround you, will fill you, will help you to remember, and in remembering, honor the gift and blessing of Erin's extravagant life, and in time beauty will heal your souls, for God dwells in beauty, God's beauty pervades, and God's beauty never ends.

God Bless you Friends. Amen.