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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 6, 2019  
(Previously preached on 2-24-1993)  
1<sup>st</sup> Midweek Lent

Passion History : In the Upper Room - 1  
Hymns: 140; 159; 245; 558

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:6-13

<sup>6</sup>And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup>a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured *it* on His head as He sat *at the table*. <sup>8</sup>But when His disciples saw *it*, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? <sup>9</sup>For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to *the poor*."

<sup>10</sup>But when Jesus was aware of *it*, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. <sup>11</sup>For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. <sup>12</sup>For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did *it* for My burial. <sup>13</sup>Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, who died for us, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Mementos --

In times of war it is a common practice for soldiers to bring things home from the front, a kind of souvenir, or memento of that experience from that time of conflict, and hopefully, a symbol of the victory that was won. Sometimes these items are

still functional, but often they are simply trophies to be seen taken out of some old trunk from time to time to prod the memory, to bring back the lessons of war. People today still seek out and collect these mementos of the great wars in history. Civil war mementos can be of great value. So also are souvenirs of the Second World War, which involved more nations and soldiers with more casualties worldwide than any other war. Some say it was the greatest of all wars.

But there was another war, a war with even greater stakes, and mightier forces than all the forces used in World War II, including the Atom Bomb. This conflict began in the Garden of Eden where the battle lines were drawn. It was to be a battle of champions, winner take all. Satan, the old evil foe, would be engaged in head to head combat with the Seed of the woman, the Savior which God would send into the world. The victory was won by Jesus, and decisively so! In His loving grace He bestows the benefits of that victory upon us. Through faith in His name we share in that victory over the devil, and are granted freedom from sin, death and eternal condemnation.

There are mementos of that war also, items spoken of in the Scriptures though they have been lost in the sands of time. Of themselves they may have no great value, but as we review the record of Jesus' Passion they remind us of the truths we treasure, truths of our salvation.

So this evening let us look at one of these mementos of our Savior's Passion – **An Alabaster Box of precious anointing ointment.**

**THEME: The Anointing of Jesus' Body in Bethany Reminds Us of How Precious the Lord's Passion Is.**

### **I. Let us consider the Significance of this Act.**

This woman carrying the alabaster box is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mary possessed an understanding of what was about to happen. Jesus had made this trip to Jerusalem for one purpose that He might suffer and die for the sins of the world. On a number of different occasions Jesus had taught the disciples that it was necessary, that it was inevitable, that it was His purpose of life to die at the hands of His enemies, and that the third day He would rise again. On

one of these occasions Peter rebuked Jesus for talking like that! The disciples didn't want to hear it! They refused to accept Jesus' word in this matter, perhaps dismissing it as pessimistic speculation on the part of Jesus. Not only did they shut out the facts of what was going to happen later that very same week, they also did not yet comprehend the great significance these events held for them. Mary did!

It was the custom of the time as well as of the Jewish people to prepare the bodies of their loved ones for burial by anointing the bodies with fragrant embalming oils as the bodies were wrapped in in linens and then were laid in sepulchers, cave type graves of natural origin or dug into hillsides. It was just such oils Mary brought in that alabaster box so that she might anoint Jesus.

Mary's actions were bold, bold in a number of ways. Women weren't received into the dining halls of a formal dinner except to serve. Mary came to Jesus in the presence of the men, as the men were reclined at such a formal dinner, a dinner that had been prepared by Martha in the house of Simon the leper. She approached the Lord carrying that beautiful, translucent, milky white perfume box which Matthew tells us held a very costly fragrant oil. Then Mary proceeded to pour this expensive oil on Jesus' head. John reports in his gospel account of this event that Mary also anointed Jesus' feet. Then in front of all these men she let down her hair. She let down her hair! Modest women just didn't do that in public! Mary proceeded to wipe the excess oil from Jesus' feet with her hair.

Mary understood not only that Jesus was about to die, but also that the circumstances of Jesus' death would not allow the opportunity for a proper preparation of the Lord's body for burial. She would render the Lord due service and honor at that moment, while she had opportunity, before He would go forth to His bitter sufferings and death. What faith Mary possessed! She had sat at Jesus' feet when others were bothered about other things. Jesus' words were precious to Mary, and she knew and believed that all would take place as the Lord had taught her.

Consider

## **II. The Spirit of this Act.**

Mary's act of anointing Jesus in the manner which she did demonstrated the love she had for Jesus as her Savior. She possessed a deep heartfelt gratitude for the sacrifice which the Lord was about to make for her salvation. In great humility she demonstrated the high value of the Lord Jesus, and His gospel, and His sacrifice for sin. Yes, her action was a symbolic one, but it was not empty symbolism; it was an act of worship and reverence for her Redeemer!

Look at --

### **III. The Reaction this Anointing Aroused!**

First look at the reaction of the disciples. Mary had caused quite a commotion among them. Led by Judas the disciples exploded with indignation, "What a waste!" They saw this act of love as a horrible waste of money that could have done so much good for the poor. While most of the disciples were perhaps just misguided by their lack of spiritual understanding, we are told in John's gospel that Judas had selfish motives for his consternation. He was a thief and the treasurer for the band of disciples. He was abhorred by the sight of money going down the drain as it were, money that he might have gotten his grubby hands on!

Now look at Jesus reaction to this act. Basically, Jesus told them all to back off and give Mary some peace. He received her act as the act of love and devotion which it was. He received it gladly. As for the poor, they are to be helped, but one need not exclude love offerings for the Lord for the sake of the poor. This was a special instance, a onetime opportunity for a special service to the Lord, and so Jesus gratefully received Mary's offering.

Now let's consider what ought to be the response of our hearts. We also should be moved by Jesus' words, Right then and there Jesus foretold that Mary would be held before us yet today as an example for us to emulate. What is to be learned from Mary is the attitude of appreciation and love she showed in her act. She realized and sought to reflect the high value of Jesus' loving sacrifice in the generosity of her own act of love. While we admire Mary for her faith and devotion, it would be her desire for us that we direct our admiration to the Lord who has redeemed her, to the Lord who has redeemed us all at the cost of His most precious blood.

We join with the hymn-writer with words of praise:

“I praise Thee, Savior, whose compassion  
Did bring thee down to ransom me;  
Thy pitying heart sought my salvation  
Though keenest woes were heaped on Thee.  
Bro’t me from bondage full release,  
Made me Thine own and gave me peace.” (The Lutheran Hymnal  
243:3)

May we be touched in our hearts throughout this Lenten season, May we be moved to recall the greatest love of all in Christ our Savior and the sacrifice He made by this memento of An Alabaster Box.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.