

*Author and business leader Fred Smith writes: “One of my treasured memories comes from a doughnut shop in Grand Saline, Texas. A young farm couple was sitting at the table next to mine. He was wearing overalls and she a gingham dress. After finishing their doughnuts, he got up to pay the bill, and I noticed she did not get up to follow him.*

*But then he came back and stood in front of her. She put her arms around his neck, and he lifted her up, revealing that she was wearing a full-body brace. He lifted her out of her chair and backed out the front door to the pick-up truck, with her hanging from his neck. As he gently put her into the truck, everyone in the doughnut shop watched. No one said anything until a waitress remarked, almost reverently, ‘He took his vows to love her seriously.’”*

This was a man who said “*I love you*” without saying the words “*I love you.*” You know, we are all called to love and we all want to be loved, and we express love and receive love in many different ways. According to Dr. Gary Chapman, different people with different personalities express and receive love in different ways – and he has categorized these ways in five different – what he calls *love languages*: words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Chapman explains that for each of us, one of these five languages tends to be a natural primary language when it comes to expressing and receiving love.

For example, I tend to value acts of service – I do that here and I do that at home, and I show love to my wife by doing practical things I think she will appreciate. That makes sense to me, and I think she understands what I am doing, but with that said, she’s different and she has a different love language, and it’s incumbent on me to love her in a way that she appreciates and understands. So, all of us have a natural primary way of receiving and expressing love, but we must be mindful that the ones we love may receive and express love differently and we must meet them where they are.

On this Palm Sunday morning, we are going to look at a passage where we see love on full display, and it begins on a Saturday – the day before Jesus made His *Triumphal Entry* into Jerusalem. For Jesus – three years have come and gone in His earthy ministry, and now He comes to His final week. For three years, Jesus has been preaching and teaching and performing miracles – in fact, just a short time before, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and as you might imagine, that caused quite a stir. Jesus is really popular among the common people, but His popularity has also drawn the ire of the religious leaders who have no love for Jesus and want to see Him gone.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **John 12** and we will begin with **verse 1**. John says,

**<sup>1</sup>Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving; but Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.**

Six days before the Passover – six days before the Lord’s crucifixion, Jesus returned to the village of **Bethany** – which is about two miles away from Jerusalem. Jesus had come from Jericho along with many others who were making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover, and while others continued on, Jesus and His disciples stopped in Bethany to relax and to spend some time with friends.

Now, although it’s not stated here, **Matthew** tells us that they were at the house of *Simon the leper* or probably more accurate *Simon who used to be a leper* because if he was still a leper, it is doubtful he would be hosting this **supper**. So, sometime, somewhere, Simon had crossed paths with Jesus, Jesus healed him, and then Simon would have gone to the temple to be examined by a priest to verify he was clean.

Simon is hosting this supper to honor Jesus – surely, he’s thankful and grateful for what Jesus had done for him, and according to this passage, others were at the house as well. Of course, we know the twelve disciples were there, and so was the new and improved **Lazarus**. As was their custom, the men were reclining around the table – eating supper, telling their best stories – maybe Simon told the men how Jesus had healed him, and I suspect, Lazarus topped all the stories as he told how Jesus had **raised him from the dead**. Can you imagine that story and the questions that followed? Lazarus, do you still have that scar on your knee? Is your eye sight 20/20? What was that like for those four days on the other side? I’m sure that Lazarus had a lot to say, even though in the Bible, he is never recorded of saying anything.

We are told that **Martha** – the sister of Lazarus was there, and surprise – surprise, she’s serving. If you remember, sometime earlier, Jesus and His disciples had come to Bethany and Martha welcomed them into her home. Jesus was speaking, Martha was busy making sure everything just right, making sure her guests got the royal treatment, and her younger sister Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and just soaking it all in. Well, Martha got upset – there’s some tension, and she asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her out, but Jesus told Martha, that for the moment, her

sister had chosen to do the best thing – the only needful thing. Its as if Jesus was saying something like this:

*“Martha, I truly appreciate what you are doing, but you are so busy doing all this stuff for Me, that you have no time with Me. Martha, you are doing many things, but Mary has chosen the one thing – that is to be with Me and to know Me.”*

So here at Simon’s house, after her brother Lazarus had been brought back to life, Martha is still serving – that seems to be her love language – but this time we might say she “*whistles while she works*” – she’s not complaining about her sister **Mary**.

And speaking of Mary – she’s at the supper too. Let’s continue with **verse 3**.

**Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.**

As Jesus and the men were reclining at the table, Mary enters the room with an alabaster vial, and this vial contained a very costly oil made from pure spikenard or **nard** for short. Nard is an aromatic rose-colored essential oil that comes from the root of a rare plant found in the mountains of northern India. The oil has, since ancient times, been used as a perfume, as a medicine, and used in religious ceremonies throughout the world. It was so expensive, only the very wealthy could afford to purchase it. We are not told how Mary had this in her possession – but she’s got it, a pound of it – 16 ounces, and she knows what to do with it.

Now, it was common custom in that culture to provide a guest who entered your home the ability to have their feet washed. Remember, everyone is wearing sandals. When a person came to your home, you offered them water and a towel so they could wash their feet – or if you had a slave, you had them wash the feet of your guest. It was a very lowly service, but Mary humbled herself and took the role of a slave. Now, it’s also my understanding that putting a little oil on the head of a guest was a courtesy as well. Typically, it was olive oil, sometimes mixed with spices, but when it came to Jesus – that just wouldn’t do for Mary.

According to **Matthew** and **Mark** she poured the oil on the Lord’s head, while **John** says she poured it on His feet – and both are true. She poured this rose red oil on His head and His feet and the aroma filled the room. Mary did not have a towel, so she used her **hair** to wipe the feet of Jesus. Mary wasn’t asked to do it –

she wasn't forced to do it – but out of an expression of her love for Jesus – she just does it – her love would not allow her to stop pouring. This oil was probably the most valuable and precious thing she had, but nothing she had could compare to who had her. By her act, Mary was saying “*I love you*” without saying the words “*I love you.*” She was telling Jesus, “*You mean more to me than anything in this world!*”

Ideally, we would have thought this loving act by Mary towards Jesus would be a joyous moment – but not so fast. As is often the case, there are critics who find a way to spoil the moment, and beginning with **verse 4** we are told,

**<sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, <sup>5</sup>“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?” <sup>6</sup>Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it. <sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said, “Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. <sup>8</sup>For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me.”**

Before we dig into this, I need to point out that what John writes here, was written some 50 to 60 years later, and what he says as an old man, may not have been known to him at this point in time, and I will explain this in a bit.

So, these are the first recorded words of **Judas**, and what he says sounds really spiritual. “*Hey, that stuff could have been sold for 300 denarii – a year’s worth of wages to care for the poor.*” That sounds really righteous, in fact, according to **Matthew** and **Mark**, some of the other disciples agreed with Judas – from their perspective, they considered Mary’s act of love to be nothing but a waste.

*Charles Francis Adams, the 19th century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he entered: “Went fishing with my son today – a day wasted.” His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in existence.*

*On that same day, Brook Adams made this entry: “Went fishing with my father – the most wonderful day of my life!” The father thought he was wasting his time while fishing with his son, but his son saw it as precious time well spent.*

It’s all about perspective. The disciples, whose spokesman here was Judas, misunderstood and misinterpreted Mary’s expression of love for Jesus, and let me

say this about Judas. At this point in time, Judas was a trusted disciple – he was the treasurer – he was in charge of the money box.

If you recall at the Last Supper, Jesus said, *“Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me”* but no one looked over at Judas and said *“Oh yeah, we know he’s the rat.”* Nobody did that, and it’s only later that John learns Judas was helping himself to the money box. Judas didn’t care for the poor – he was a thief who only cared for himself. If anybody was stealing from the poor, it wasn’t Mary – it was Judas.

Publicly, Judas appeared to be a righteous man with a heart for God and for people, but privately, he was really something else, and it’s at this point that Judas decided to betray Jesus.

Well, Mary was silent in all of this, she doesn’t defend herself, but Jesus does. He says, **“Let her alone.”** Jesus defends her and He explains that those who were complaining, were those who did not understand – for what she did, she did for His **burial.**

This Mary, Mary of Bethany, seems to be the only one who understood what was happening and what was going to happen. Several times during His earthly ministry, Jesus explained that He would be delivered into the hands of wicked men and mocked and scourged and crucified, and His disciples just didn’t get it – but Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus, did.

And here’s something else. This Mary was not at the crucifixion nor was she at the tomb with the others on Easter Sunday morning to anoint the body of Jesus after Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea did a rush job. When the others came to the tomb – the stone was already rolled away and the tomb was empty. They never got to anoint the body of Jesus, but here Mary does it a week before His crucifixion. That’s what Jesus is talking about here.

*“Let her alone. Mary knows what’s going to happen to Me in a matter of days, she knows I’m going to lay down My life, and she’s anointing Me for burial in advance.”*

Jesus says **“you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me”** and what He means by that is this: You will always have an opportunity to help the poor and you should. There will always be the poor around you, but what Mary has done has to happen now, and she’s the only one who seems to know it.

Well, many who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover heard that Jesus was in the village of Bethany, and beginning with **verse 9**, this is what we are told:

**<sup>9</sup> The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. <sup>10</sup> But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; <sup>11</sup> because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.**

The people had heard about Jesus and what He did to Lazarus. They had heard about this miracle of miracles – bringing someone back to life who had been dead and buried for four days – and to these people *seeing was believing* and out of curiosity, they had to see for themselves.

Many came by, they saw for themselves, and they believed, but not the **chief priests** known as the *Sadducees*. The Sadducees were the religious elite, they were very political, they controlled the Sanhedrin, and theologically, they only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament written by Moses – and they rejected the idea of the resurrection – life after death. For them, there was no heaven or hell, and when a man died, he simply ceased to exist. Well, Jesus taught just the opposite, and Lazarus was the evidence. The Sadducees were embarrassed, they were in error, so now it's necessary to remove the evidence by taking both Jesus and Lazarus out of the picture.

If you think about it, poor Lazarus hadn't done anything wrong other than to die. He didn't know what Jesus was going to do. It wasn't his idea to do the bunny hop out of the tomb because he was tightly wrapped in burial cloth. He had no choice in the matter, he's just along for the ride, but unbeknownst to him, he's now a marked man by the Sadducees.

Now, just as a side note, although it's not mentioned in the Bible, according to an Eastern Orthodox tradition, after the Lord's resurrection, it is said that Lazarus and his sisters fled to Kition along the southern coast of Cyprus, and later when the Apostle Paul and Barnabas travelled to Cyprus, they ordained Lazarus as the first Bishop of Kition.

So, it would seem that Lazarus and his sisters eventually flee to safety, but Jesus has no intention of fleeing anywhere. Beginning with **verse 12**, John tells us this:

**<sup>12</sup> On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, <sup>13</sup> took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”**

On Sunday, five days before His crucifixion, Jesus leaves the house of Simon in Bethany and makes His way towards **Jerusalem** which is only two miles away. He’s now riding a young donkey, and we are told that Jesus does something He had never done before – something He had repeatedly cautioned others not to do for Him. Jesus publicly reveals that He is the Messiah they have been waiting for all along. He is the King.

So, without saying a word, Jesus publicly reveals His identity, and as He rides towards Jerusalem, we are told that many were cutting down **branches** from the palm trees and spreading them on the road. This would be our version of rolling out the red carpet for a very important person. Again, this was a response fit for the King.

In praise, we are told the people shouted, **“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.”**

Jesus allowed Himself to be praised by the crowds. **Hosanna** means “*save now*” and it comes from **Psalm 118**, a psalm that celebrated Israel’s deliverance from captivity.

So, “*Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*” was a shout of praise to the One who had the power to save. “*Jesus, save us now – overthrow our enemies now – deliver us from captivity now – establish Your earthly kingdom now.*”

That’s what the Jews expected from their Messiah and King – “*Jesus, save us now*” – and here’s the thing, that’s exactly what He had come to do – but not in the way they expected or understood because this King would not *reign* until He had first *redeemed*.

Jesus entered Jerusalem, but His ultimate destination was to you – through a cross. The cross was a symbol of violence and hatred, but Jesus turned it into an expression of amazing love. On the cross, Jesus said “*I love you*” without saying the words “*I love you.*” **What more could He do? What more could He say?**

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