



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
12500 E. 183rd St., Cerritos, CA 90703
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

Mailing Address : 11428 E. Artesia Blvd. # 4 ; Artesia, CA 90701
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Website : www.sp-ecc.org

March 29, 2009

Theme: Passionate about the Passion

Text: Matthew 26:6-13

This is a beautiful story about an action taken by a woman to anoint Jesus with expensive perfume before his death. John tells us that the woman was Mary the sister of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. This story stands in sharp contrast to the evil scheming of Caiaphas, the chief priests, and the rulers of the Jews. Matthew probably places the story here for that very purpose. Mary issues a call to worship to all believers. By anointing Jesus with her expensive perfume, Mary was also expressing her obedience to what Jesus had declared was the first command of the Torah—to Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. She worships Jesus lavishly and extravagantly. In this story we find an example of what it means to love Jesus wholeheartedly. We also get yet another glimpse of Jesus' gracious way of treating people. He graciously protected her and defended her from the angry criticism of other disciples. Because it is placed in the midst of Judas' betrayal and Caiaphas' evil scheming, the story shows us that a deep, deep love for God can exist in the midst of hatred, betrayal and denial.

At a human level Mary's behavior is outrageous. It is outrageous because of the fact that a woman would dare to enter into a feast that is attended by men. Her behavior is outrageous because of cost of the perfume. Women were not highly regarded in Jewish culture. One of the prayers that the rabbis would pray went something like this: Lord, I thank you that you have not made me an animal, a Gentile, or a woman. Here mere entrance into the company of man would have been unwanted and unwarranted in that culture. Mary cared nothing at all about the cost of the perfume. She cared nothing about what people thought. Her only objective was to express her love for Jesus in the most beautiful way she knew how. Do we dare to ignore the opinions in order to express our pure devotion to Christ in worship? Mary calls us to do that—and not just on Sunday but in all of life.

Jesus' disciples are quick to judge Mary. They probably resent her presence among them at all. Then there is the issue of the cost of the perfume. Mark gives the cost as 300 denarii. This is about a year's worth of wages for a common laborer. We need to understand that there were three practices that were common to spiritual devotion in Jesus' day. These were, fasting, prayer, and giving to the poor. Jesus' male disciples thought that they were standing on solid ground when they criticized Mary. After all, Jesus had ordered a rich man to sell everything he had and give it to the poor. Earlier in the Gospel Jesus had said that the ultimate sign that the Messiah had come was the fact that the good news was being preached to the poor. Jesus' male disciples have failed to remember who Jesus is—the Messiah, the Son of God. Mary remembered. Perhaps she had a better understanding than the male disciples that Jesus was going to die on the



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cross. Jesus generously interprets here action in a positive way so as to defend her against the criticism of his male disciples. Jesus makes this point: They can always help the poor because the poor will always be with them, but He will not always be with them. Jesus indicates that her act of devotion was advance preparation for his burial. The Jews did not embalm their dead, so that would put fragrant perfumes and spices in the grave-clothes to offset the smell of the decaying of the body. Jesus says that Mary has prepared His body in advance of the crucifixion.

Jesus promises that wherever the good news is preached, her selfless act of devotion wherever Jesus' commitment to the salvation of men and women is told. The message of this passage is simple but profound. God calls his people to love Him about all people places and things. He calls us all to a new and renewed commitment to worship Him with our whole being. He calls us to do this on the Lord's Day. He calls us to do this every day in every aspect of our life.