

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church, 4/3/2022 John 12:1-8 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

On Thursday afternoon, my phone, which was set on silent because I was writing this sermon, went off in an alarming way, as did the phones of Dana and Connie. It was a tornado warning. We quickly gathered and tried to track the storm on our computers, because if we were in the path of a tornado the three of us and Pepper would need to gather in the women's restrooms, the safest spot for such a storm, and squeezing in there didn't sound very fun unless it was necessary.

Fortunately the storm passed us by, but since moving here eleven years ago I've been fascinated by the extreme weather in this unassuming suburb. What is it about this place? Months after we moved in, a tree fell on our house during a storm. The next day, strangers drove through our cul-de-sac to see and take pictures of our house with the big oak precariously perched against it.

I've often invited you to wonder what happens after a big event in the Bible: like last Sunday, I suggested you think about what happened the day after the prodigal son returned home. When we left the story, there was music and dancing and an argument between the father and the elder son: but what about the next day? Would the younger son have to take off the family ring? Would the younger son take over feeding his father's pigs? Would a soup stock be made out of the bones of the fatted calf? What happens *after* the big event?

Today we get a bit of a what-happened-next story. In the previous chapter, after not coming when Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was ill, Lazarus died and Jesus commanded him to come out of his tomb, which Lazarus did, and then Jesus said "unbind him, and let him go." Some saw this and believed in Jesus while others reported him to the Pharisees, and with the Pharisees worked up, Jesus went to Ephraim for a bit.

But now he's back in Bethany and we see him with Lazarus and Mary and Martha eating dinner. So here we are seeing what happened next; what happened after the dead guy came back to life. We don't hear Lazarus say anything in this scene, or anywhere for that matter. His sisters do all the talking. In this scene, Martha serves dinner, and then we have Mary, anointing Jesus with a costly cream before wiping it off with her hair, filling the house with the fragrance of the perfume.

Jesus says that Mary bought that perfume to use for the day of his burial. Do you think she also used nard when her brother was buried? Was this leftover nard from that, or did she procure something special for Jesus because she was overcome with gratitude for what he had done for their family? Do you think, as she rubbed this nard on Jesus, that she remembered anointing her brother after his death?

After Lazarus died and Jesus told onlookers to remove the stone to the tomb where Lazarus lay, Martha said, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Do you think that smell improved after Lazarus came back to life? Maybe that stench of death lingered in their house, and the nard fragrance that now filled the place was a welcome respite.

So many questions left unanswered, but I love the opportunity to see this family again *after* the miracle. We heard one sentence translated "and Lazarus was one of those at the table with"

Jesus, which literally translates as “Lazarus was one of those *reclining* with” Jesus. Picture how relaxed this dinner was, with the diners reclining at a low table. Jesus was very much at home with these close friends: kicking back, enjoying some of Martha’s marvelous food.

Then Mary anointed him with the nard, turning an ordinary evening into something that we are reading about some two thousand years later.

How do we recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary? I wonder if they all immediately recognized this as extraordinary, or if only later remembered this moment, after Jesus was arrested and crucified; if then they said, “remember how he said that Mary was anointing him for burial?”

Judas criticized Mary for this extravagant gesture, but a few chapters later, after Jesus had been crucified, Nicodemus brought seventy-five pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloe. Can you imagine how fragrant that must have smelled, and how heavy all that stuff would have been underneath the linen cloths they wrapped around Jesus after he resurrected? Surely having this beloved sister rub his feet was a more pleasant experience. Here, in this interlude, he was surrounded by people who loved him, unlike when he was hanging on cross, after his beloved friend Peter had denied him three times.

Because they had to get Jesus buried before the sabbath, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea probably wrapped Jesus with those seventy-five pounds of spices pretty fast. They put him in a nearby tomb because they were in a hurry. Contrast that with Mary lovingly rubbing his feet with nard and then wiping them with her hair.

I have been attempting to slow down during Lent: to savor rather than rush. This interlude with a family whose life was changed due to a miracle of Jesus is a moment to savor, as is this week before Holy Week. Next Sunday is Palm and Passion Sunday, with the passion and the drama, and then we have five special services between then and Easter Sunday.

In these waning days of Lent, seek out ordinary moments to savor. Later you may remember them as something special. Savor them as they happen.