

Misjudging Eyes

**First Presbyterian Church
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**Mark 14:3-9
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In his book “The Tinsel and the Hay,” Harold Kohn tells of a government agent who was sent to the Smoky Mountains in Tennessee during the Great Depression of the 1930s. “The federal government was making small allotments to impoverished farmers for stock, feed and necessary equipment.

The agent came upon a mountain woman who lived all alone (trying to make) a living from two acres of land. She had no floors in her cabin (save for the packed earth) and just a few sticks of homemade furniture. Daylight streamed through chinks in the cabin walls. The agent looked around and then asked, ‘If the government gave you 200 dollars, what would you do with it?’ The woman weighed the question for a moment and then replied, ‘Reckon I’d give it to the poor.’¹ How we see people of different economic means has more to do with us than with them.

This week, we begin a Lenten sermon series titled “Were You There,” looking through the eyes of those surrounding Jesus in his final weeks of earthy ministry. Today, we look through the eyes of those who misjudge others based on their own short sightedness.

In today’s New Testament lesson, we see the woman and Jesus and his disciples, all of them together in the house of Simon the leper. Of course, if it weren’t for Jesus, none of them would be in the house of a leper. Leprosy was seen as the mark of a sinner. But what if this was the house of a Pharisee and not a leper? Does that change the story? Maybe. I mean Luke tells the same story except Mark in Luke they are in the house of Simon the Pharisee, not Simon the leper.

Also in Luke, the woman who anoints Jesus is identified as the sinner of the story, a sinner whose devotion to Jesus results in him saying to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Whereas Mark describes her as “a woman ... with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment.” In Mark, she’s not a sinner. She’s a wealthy woman carrying around expensive perfume in an expensive jar made out of pure-white stone.

Two very different pictures. The point is, it doesn’t matter whether you consider yourself or others rich or poor, sinner or saint – Jesus has a message for you, saying, “... You always have the poor with you ..., but you do not always have me.” In other words, it’s not about the rich and the poor, sinners and saints; it’s about you and Jesus, remembering Jesus in all that you do, and valuing Jesus as the most important part aspect of your life.

¹ Harold Kohn, *The Tinsel and the Hay*, (Nashville: Tidings, 1968), 77.

We see this after the woman anoints Jesus with the perfume and the disciples scold her, saying, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way?” Wow! Wasted on Jesus. Of all the things we waste our time and money on, Jesus isn’t one of them. With Jesus, whatever time we put in, whatever we give is not a waste. The waste is when we hold back from Jesus.

The disciples are worried about wasting the perfume on Jesus, saying, “This ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” But would it have been? As history shows, no, not so much. We don’t see people selling expensive items and giving the money to the poor. We all struggle with using what we have for the building up of God’s peaceful Kingdom of grace and mercy and abundance for all.

And in that struggle, we all wish we had more time, more money, more energy. And yet, do we really use what we do have according to what Jesus taught us? It’s not more time or money or energy that we need. What we need is the will to use what we have in godly, faithful ways.

After the woman anoints Jesus’ head, he says to those around her, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for 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.” Jesus is pointing out that, too often, we don’t show kindness to one another. We don’t see others through the eyes of Jesus. Through Jesus’ eyes, no kindness is ever wasted. Anything and everything we do in his name brings blessing to all the world. And in fact, the greatest blessing this world could ever have is more people seeing things through the eyes of Christ, giving of themselves for the sake of Jesus, proclaiming the gospel in word and deed.

Seeing through the eyes of Jesus us means finding value in the person standing before you. Giving of ourselves for the sake of Jesus means using our resources – our time and energy to spotlight Jesus in our lives and in this world.

Sitting around that table with his disciples, Jesus sees them scolding the woman and he says, “Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Now of course, it’s not the unnamed woman who is remembered, but rather what she did for Jesus, Jesus who in just a few weeks will again gather at table with his disciples, break the bread and bless the cup, and instruct them to do that in remembrance of him, which we will do in Holy Communion today.

Our act of Communion is an act of remembering Jesus and all he taught. It’s a proclamation in word and deed that Jesus is active in this world and active in our lives. But of course, it takes more than joining in Communion as we are gathered today.

No, in order for people to see Jesus more active in this world, he has to be active in our lives. The season of Lent is a time when we seek to go deeper with Jesus, give more of ourselves for his sake and for the sake of the gospel.

The woman didn't just pour expensive perfume over Jesus' head. Mark tells us she actually broke open the jar to do it, an expensive, alabaster jar. She didn't hold anything back. As Jesus said, "She has done what she could." I wonder. I wonder what she thought as she entered the house with that perfume, and saw with her own eyes, Jesus sitting there. Was she excited about what she was going to do? Maybe she was nervous, giving up all that perfume, or self-conscious about being so close to Jesus with so many people around? Did she worry, worry she would miss having the perfume and wish she had it back to sell for something she needed?

How do you feel when you think about giving up something for Jesus? Are you self-conscious about what others think about you, excited, nervous, worried you'll miss what you're giving up?

Barbara Brown Taylor in her book "The Seeds of Heaven," says, "... To follow Jesus means going beyond the limits of our own comfort and safety. It means receiving our lives as gifts, instead of guarding them as our own possessions. It means sharing the life we have been given, instead of bottling it for our own consumption."

This is our opportunity – your opportunity – to pour out your life more fully for the sake of Jesus. So ask yourself, where are you bottled up when it comes to drawing closer to the Lord, what are you guarding as your own that could be more faithfully be given for the sake of Jesus, for the sake of the gospel he embodies. Continue to take time this Lenten season to stretch yourself in your devotion to the Lord, and seek new and meaningful ways to give of yourself for the sake of others.

And then return next week for worship when we continue our sermon series, looking through the Betraying Eyes of Judas and how his act can guide us to more faithfully journey alongside Jesus in his final days of earthly ministry. Amen.