

“Places of the Passion: Bethany”

Matthew 26: 6-13 6 Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy. 7 While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume and poured it over his head.

8 The disciples were indignant when they saw this. “What a waste!” they said. 9 “It could have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.” 10 But Jesus, aware of this, replied, “Why criticize this woman for doing such a good thing to me? 11 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. 12 She has poured this perfume on me to prepare my body for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman’s deed will be remembered and discussed.”

---This story also appears in Mark chapter 14

2 Corinthians 8: 1-5 Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in His kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia. 2 They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.

3 For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 4 They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. 5 They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.”

Babette’s Feast is a movie about Babette, who was one of the most talented chefs in Paris. One day authorities kick Babette out of Paris so she moves to a Danish fishing village whose small religious community is full of hardhearted people. The community is marked by one word—get. Get ahead. Get back. Get even. And whatever you do—get revenge. The community takes Babette in and she serves as their maid and cook. They only want her to serve bland food because that’s all they know. That’s what happens when people are driven by the word get. Life is bland—very vanilla and very bland!

One day another word broadsides the community. Babette wins a lottery in Paris and so she cooks a feast. She treats the religious community to a meal of rare delicacies, excellent wine and some of the best gourmet food in the world. And the community is restored. Arguments are dropped. Past sins are forgiven. And when the evening is finished, they join hands under the stars and sing the Doxology. Babette replaces the word get with what word? Give. Babette gives freely, Babette gives extravagantly and Babette gives joyfully.

Later, though, the community discovers what Babette had really done. She had spent all of her lottery money on the feast—not just a portion of it, as they had thought. In doing so Babette closes the door to her future. She can never return to Paris and never

take up a post as a chef at one of the world's leading restaurants. And why is that? Babette gave it all!

I am pausing our sermon series on the book of Hebrews until the week after Easter. So today is the first in a Lenten sermon series called Places of the Passion. Today we walk with Jesus to Bethany. In Bethany we meet Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. And who is Mary? Mary is the Babette of the Bible! Here is the Context. "Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper ... (Matthew 26:6) Bethany is just a mile east of Jerusalem, on the Mt. of Olives. The Jewish Passover is about to begin and Jesus is in Bethany. Why Bethany?

Because there were no empty hotel rooms in Jerusalem. Jerusalem's population at the time of Christ was about 30,000. During Passover, it would balloon to roughly 180,000 people. The city's population would increase six-fold! This is why Jesus stayed in Bethany—on the outskirts of Jerusalem—during Passover week. Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. It was where Mary and Martha their brother Lazarus lived.

Who is in Bethany? Simon the Leper—his home is where these events take place. Simon had been healed of leprosy. Someone with active leprosy would not have had a lot of people show up at his home for dinner! Jesus is there in Simon's home and so are his disciples. So is Mary! Normally women didn't join men in public events like this. That's a shock at the start. Mary is there—the Babette of the Bible—ready to teach us about one of the greatest words in the world. Give! **[NOTE 1]**

That's the context. Here's the cost. "A woman [John 12:3 tells us that the woman is Mary] came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table." (Matthew 26:7) How much did the perfume cost? We're told in John 12:5 that it's worth a year's income. Woe! A year's income! The average American makes \$46,000 a year! Imagine dropping \$46,000 just like that?

As everyone in the room watches, Mary does two remarkable things. First, she pours out very expensive perfume with total abandon. It's the most valuable thing Mary has, but she will not keep it. She will not worship it. She opens it and empties it out to the very last drop to anoint Jesus, to worship Him. Second, Mary pours it on Jesus' head. The only people in the Old Testament whose heads were regularly anointed were who? Kings! Do you understand? Jesus is a king. Strike that, Jesus is The King! That's the main message of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 2:3 calls him the "King of the Jews." Matthew 21:5 refers to Jesus with these words, "See your King comes to you." Matthew 27:37 records the sign above the Savior's head while he dies on a cross, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Because Jesus is the King, Mary replaces the word get with give.

The context? Bethany during Passover Week. The cost? Everything. Now for the comparison. It's between Mary and the disciples. Mary is extravagant. Mary is excessive. Mary goes way over the top. And the disciples? "When the disciples saw it, they were indignant". Now that is a word that I can't say I remember ever having heard come from the mouth of one of my friends. Indignant is an "adjective that means feeling

or showing anger or annoyance at what is perceived as unfair treatment.” So the disciples are annoyed with Mary’s extravagance, saying, ‘Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.’” (Matthew 26:8–9) The disciples are threatened. Their entire world comes crashing down. The disciples were angry. Mad! Upset! All because Mary lives by one word—give. [NOTE 2]

The comparison couldn’t be more black and white. Mary is generous. The disciples are greedy. Mary gives with abandon. The disciples are miserly to a tee. Mary sacrifices financially. The disciples won’t give a nickel. Mary shows her faith with actions. The disciples talk a good game—“giving money to the poor”—but I don’t really know if they mean it. Mary loves the word give. But all the disciples can do is get. Get more. Get ahead. And get out on top. That is how things look here in Matthew chapter 26.

“But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.’” (Matthew 26:10, 12) Beautiful? The cross? Indeed! How can an instrument of torture and death be beautiful? Mary embodied these verses in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew 1:21, “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 20:28, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 26:28, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” “In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.” “Burial?” Burial, of course, implies death. And what a death it would be! Betrayed by Judas. Denied by Peter. Sentenced by Pilate. Scourged by soldiers. Mocked by the crowds. Abandoned by his Father. Christ’s death pays for all sin, for all people, for all time. All sin. All people. All time. Mary gives Jesus everything she has. Mary prepares Jesus to give everything he has. And the room is filled with the smell of costly perfume! [NOTE 3]

Have you ever noticed that Smells are powerful? They often connect to memories. The smell of a rose catches your nose. Suddenly, you remember your first date in high school—when your boyfriend brought you a dozen roses. Or maybe it’s the scent of our grandmother’s perfume, and memories of our grandmother come flooding back. For me, the smell of pancakes or home baked bread make me think of my paternal grandmother Esther and my Mom. While words go to the thinking part of our brain, smells go to the emotional part of our brain. That’s why a whiff of grandma’s fresh baked bread brings back our emotions for grandma. Smells can stir in us some very powerful emotions.

That’s also true for Jesus. Mary’s strong perfume lingers with Jesus throughout Holy Week—as he makes his way to the cross, marking him with one word—give. Matthew 26:13 states, “Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Why is that? Because the kingdom of God isn’t about hoarding and stockpiling. The kingdom of God **isn’t** about being

chintzy and cheap. The kingdom of God isn't about get. Get will kill us. Always and forevermore God's kingdom is about one word—give. Give?

The disciples here at this time are demonstrating a “Get” attitude where G- stands for being glued to their comfort zone and not letting Jesus move them into a new paradigm to understand that He is a suffering servant type of King. E- stands for everything is about them. Our culture is so much about seeing things from our own perspective. Everything is about ME. We encounter traffic when we are in a hurry and everyone else on the road is specifically out to get in our way and make us late. T- stands for terrible thinking. Trying instead of Trusting.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus—Mary, the Babette of the Bible—Mary shows us that the kingdom of God is about giving lavishly, giving generously, giving joyfully and giving completely. “Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Jesus never says this about anyone else!

Thanks to Mary, we can boil life down to one simple word; one word with one syllable; one powerful and life-changing word. Try it out. It will change everything. It will create so much joy. The word? You know. It's the most powerful word on the planet. G-I-V-E. G-stands for Go out of your comfort zone to give and get along and make disciples. I – stands for invite. Invite people to get to know Jesus better and strive to become more like Him. Ignore the world and invite people into a closer relationship with Jesus. V- stands for vitalize. To vitalize means to give strength and energy to something, or to animate. Give your faith strength and energy and by serving others with love help them to strengthen and energize or “vitalize” their faith. May we encourage others to animate their walk with Jesus, may it come back to life. And E – stands for evangelize and energize. Point others to Jesus. May people see your love and good deeds and may they praise God and desire to have the same kind of relationship with Jesus that you have. Once people are pointed toward Christ so that they re-animate or revitalize their faith help them to energize their faith by studying the Word together and discipling them.

What are you going to do about it. How might you live out this word GIVE in your life this week? Please write an “I will ___” statement that describes what one step you will take this week to start to live the GIVE way. Go and make disciples, Invite the people that God puts in your life this week to get to know Jesus better, Vitalize your faith so that others will be encouraged by the change they see in your life, and Evangelize and energize. Get to know Jesus and share the hope that you have found in Him and energize the faith of the people that God puts in your life this week. What does that look like specifically for you this week? Please write something down and take it with you. Let's Pray ... Amen.

Sermon Notes for “Places of the Passion: Bethany” given the Second Week of Lent

Based on Matthew 26 and 2 Corinthians 8 given March 5, 2023 in Doster Community Church

- I. Mary gives extravagantly. The Alabaster jar of perfume is most likely the most valuable thing Mary has. She gives it all to worship Jesus. The only people anointed on the head were kings, in this case “The King of the Jews.”
- II. Matthew compares the attitude of the disciples with the attitude of Mary. Mary lives by the word give. The disciples are not thinking. Jesus scolds them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me...she has prepared my body for burial.”
- III. Smells are powerful in the way they connect to memories. Think about it, the room is now filled with the smell of perfume. Mary dumped a whole jar of it on Jesus’ head. Give – defines Jesus as He moves towards the cross. He gives Himself, sacrifices Himself, for you and I to be able to have access to God and eternal life as fully adopted children of the King.
- IV. The disciples were living by the word Get.
 - a. G – glued to their comfort zone, not seeing the big picture
 - b. E – Everything was about them, their place in the Kingdom, who was the greatest
 - c. T – Terrible Thinking
- V. Mary and Jesus model for us a life of extravagant sacrifice.
 - a. G – go out of your comfort zone, go and make disciples
 - b. I – Ignore the world and invite the people God puts in your life to get to know Jesus better and be more like Him.
 - c. V – vitalize- to give strength or energy to something, to animate one’s faith and do what the Word says.
 - d. E – evangelize and energize ... point others to Jesus Christ so that they re-animate/revitalize their faith by studying the Word and trying to live it out.
 - e. What are you going to do about it? What is your “I will _____” statement for this week? How can you live your life this week so that it is defined by “GIVE” much more than “GET”?