

A ROSE AMONG THORNS

Mark 14:1-11

Intro. Marlo included a rose among the daisies in our bouquets this morning---because I wanted to begin with a question about the giving and receiving of flowers.

- Ladies---if you were given a choice---which would you rather receive---roses or daisies?
- Gentlemen---if you were to purchase a bouquet---which would you choose---roses or daisies?
- If I were to guess---most women would choose roses.
- And men would choose daisies---for a reason known to any who have purchased both.
- I was fortunate for years---because Marilyn actually preferred daisies.
- Her tastes did change---and now roses are in the running---but she's happy when I bring home any flowers---even left-over church bouquets.
- Daisies or roses?
- They are both beautiful.
- Daisies are delightful---and a field of daisies is a sight to behold.
- But a rose is without a doubt a thing of beauty---even if it does have thorns.
- Why roses have thorns is something known only to the One who designed them.

- Maybe it was to protect their fragile beauty---to keep munching rodents away.
- Or maybe it was to simply serve as a contrast to their loveliness---and highlight their beauty---something we note when we say a woman in the midst of a group of men is a rose among thorns.
- With that in mind---it would appear that Mark has intentionally placed a rose among thorns in our text for today.
- Chapter 14 begins with two verses that picture the hatred of the chief priests and scribes---and verses 10 and 11 tell us of Judas's betrayal of Jesus.
- Planted in the midst of those two pictures of ugliness is a picture of beauty---of love for Jesus being lavishly expressed by a woman who anointed His head with costly perfume.
- All four gospels tell of Jesus being anointed by a woman---but there has long been a question about how many anointings actually took place.
- Origen---one of the early church fathers---thought there were three.
- Luke records an anointing that apparently took place early in Jesus' ministry---in Galilee---when a sinful woman anointed His feet in the home of a Pharisee named Simon---which led to a discussion of love and forgiveness. (Luke 7:36-50)
- John tells of an anointing that took place six days before the Passover---in Bethany---when Mary---the sister of Martha and Lazarus---anointed Jesus' feet with a pound of very costly perfume---which led to Judas objecting---saying it could have been sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor. (John 12:1-8)

- Matthew and Mark both tell of an anointing that seems to take place only two days before the Passover---again in Bethany---at the home of Simon the leper. (Matthew 26:6-13)
- There Jesus' head was anointed with costly perfume from an alabaster vial---and the disciples objected---saying it should have been sold and the money given to the poor.
- Origen thought these accounts recorded three events.
- Most liberal scholars today suggest they are all faulty records of the same event.
- Conservative scholars generally suggest there were two events ---the early anointing that took place in Galilee---and a later one that took place in Bethany.
- If that is true---and I believe it is---then the anointing by Mary ---which took place six days before the Passover---was intentionally placed here by Mark---and copied by Matthew --- as a contrast to what was happening to Jesus two days---or perhaps even a day before the Passover.
- The phrase “two days” can also be translated “on the second day”---which would mean the next day.
- Now---we tend to think history should be recorded chronologically---but it was not unusual for ancient historians to record it thematically.
- And Mark doesn't say the anointing took place two days before the Passover---he says that's when the chief priests and scribes were counseling together to kill Jesus.
- He simply noted that it was while Jesus was in Bethany that the anointing took place---apparently looking back to what had happened a few days earlier---and mentioning it here as a contrast to the hatred of the Jewish leaders and the betrayal of Judas.

- He was picturing a rose among thorns.
- At least we're going to look at it that way---looking first at the thorns---and then focusing on the rose.

I. THE THORNS

Mark 14:1-2, 10-11

- “Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread was two days off; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth, and kill Him;
- for they were saying, ‘Not during the festival, lest there be a riot of the people.’” (Mark 14:1-2)
- “And Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests, in order to betray Him to them.
- And they were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.” (Mark 14:10-11)
- We have thorns on either side of the rose.
- The first thorn being the hatred of the chief priests and scribes.
- They had long before decided that Jesus had to be neutralized.
- He was a threat to their power and position in society.
- He had exposed their hypocrisy on several occasions---and they hated Him for it.
- They had tried to discredit Him---and verbally entrap Him---but that hadn't worked.
- They hadn't been able to turn the masses against Him---so they decided they would matters into their own hands---secretly.

- Jesus was now back within their grasp---in Jerusalem---but so were crowds of pilgrims who thought He might be the Messiah they were looking for.
- The exact number of people in Jerusalem during the Passover is apparently not known---kind of like estimates of protestors at events and in the streets these days.
- I've read that the population of Jerusalem was 25,000---and it doubled to 50,000 during the Passover---that it was 50,000 and doubled to 100,000---and that it increased five-fold to 250,000 during Passover.
- Josephus records that in 65AD Roman officials kept a record of the number of lambs killed during Passover---and they counted 256,000.
- Since the Law required at least ten persons per lamb---some have estimated there were close to three million people in Jerusalem during the Passover.
- Whatever the actual number---the priests didn't want a riot on their hands---and had apparently decided to wait until after the Passover.
- Hoping the crowds would go---but Jesus would stay---and they could kill Him then.
- But it was the will of God that the Lamb of God be offered on Passover---the celebration of the day when the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt who applied the blood of a lamb to the doorway of their home.
- The symbolism was significant.
- It would now be blood of the perfect Lamb that would save those who applied it to the doorway of their heart.
- So---contrary to the plans and schemes of men---God's will was made possible---by the betrayal of Judas.
- His offer bumped up the timetable---and made it fit into God's plan---not the plan of the priests.
- Now---that doesn't exonerate Judas for what he did.
- He was a free agent in the betrayal.
- And why he went to the chief priests and offered to betray Jesus---we can only surmise.
- No doubt he didn't approve of the direction Jesus' ministry was taking.
- He---like the other disciples---didn't understand why the Messiah would have to die.
- But the bottom line appears to be that he decided if it was going to happen---he might as well profit from it.
- He went to the chief priests---they didn't come to him.
- And according to Matthew's account---he bargained for the price of betrayal---settling for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver---the value assigned in the Mosaic Law to a slave who had been gored to death by an ox.
- Perhaps he figured just being on the winning side of the confrontation between the Jewish authorities and Jesus would be of benefit to him.
- Whatever his motivation---he betrayed Jesus---and it was an ugly thing.
- But Mark contrasts that ugliness with something very beautiful.

II. THE ROSE Mark 14:3-9

- “And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.
- But some were indignantly remarking to one another, ‘Why has this perfume been wasted?’
- ‘For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.’ And they were scolding her.
- But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me.
- ‘For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me.
- ‘She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial.
- ‘And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of in memory of her.’”
- Mark doesn’t tell us this was Mary---but he does identify it as taking place in Bethany---at the home of Simon the leper.
- John gives us Mary’s name---and says the anointing took place in Bethany---but doesn’t specify the home---so there’s no contradiction between John and Mark.
- It is a little unusual that the anointing that took place earlier in Galilee was in the home of a man named Simon---and here it takes place in the home of a former leper named Simon---but Simon was a popular name.
- And Mark may have included the description---“the leper”--- to distinguish him from the Pharisee.
- The fact that John says Mary anointed Jesus’ feet---and here we read that the woman anointed His head---is not cause for concern either.
- It was customary to anoint both---while those at dinner were reclining at table---lying on pillows with an elbow on the table ---and legs stretched out alongside.
- The amount of perfume used---however---was unusual.
- Usually just a drop or two was used after washing the dirty feet of the guests---for purposes I’ll leave to your imagination.
- Mary---like the woman in Galilee had her perfume in an alabaster vial---but her vial was filled with a pound of pure nard---a very costly aromatic from the mountains of India.
- And she broke the neck of the vial---pouring its entire contents all over Jesus’ head and feet.
- John tells us Mary then wiped His feet with her hair---as did the woman in Galilee---and that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.
- It was, however, an act of extravagance that wasn’t well received by most at the dinner.
- John identified the chief objector as Judas---but Matthew notes that they were all indignant---and felt it was a waste.
- They agreed with Judas that it should have been sold---and the money given to the poor.
- 300 denarii equaled a year’s wage.
- John tells us the real reason for Judas’ objection was that he was a thief---and wanted to get his hands on the money.
- But it sounded righteous to criticize such extravagance by suggesting it could have been put to much better use.

- But Jesus came to Mary's defense---and in doing so revealed her act as a beautiful picture of love.
- A picture we would do well to duplicate---not only in relationship to Jesus---but in our relationships with each other.
- When Jesus said Mary had done a good deed to Him---He could have used one of two words---one that refers to that which is morally good---or one that refers to that which is esthetically good---that which is lovely.
- Jesus used the word for "lovely" here.
- Mary had demonstrated her love for Him by a lovely act---reminding us not only that love must be expressed---but how it should be expressed.
- And of course---we should never assume someone knows how much we love them.
- It should be expressed openly and freely---even extravagantly.
- And it should be expressed in a timely manner---at the opportune moment.
- How often have we regretted not expressing our love when the perfect moment had arrived?
- Mary could have done a lot of good with \$50,000 in today's money---she could have helped a lot of people.
- But there would be other opportunities to help the poor.
- The moment to extravagantly express her love for Jesus---however---would be gone---if she didn't seize the moment.
- So she seized it---without regrets.
- And while what she did may have seemed excessively extravagant to some---she did what she could do.
- It was her vial---and she could do with it whatever she wished.
- Obviously not many could do anything that extravagant.
- Most don't have the resources---but she did---and for her to do less would have been a cheap expression of her love.
- Not that the value of the expression---in and of itself---matters.
- As Mother Teresa said---"For God, it is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving."
- Whether the gift is two copper coins or a vial of nard---it's the love that goes into the giving that matters most.
- And it doesn't even have to be a material gift.
- Just make sure you express your love in a language that can be heard---and that shows you put thought into it.
- Now---that's not to say it's wrong to bring home a church bouquet.
- Flowers shouldn't be left to wither in an empty church.
- Just don't be shocked when church flowers---no matter how beautiful---aren't viewed as a thoughtful expression of love.
- What Mary did for Jesus was a thoughtful expression of love.
- Whether she understood the full significance of what she was doing for Jesus---or not---we have no way of knowing.
- But she was anointing His body for burial.

- We do know Mary listened carefully when Jesus taught---so much so that it annoyed her sister Martha who was busy with pots and pans---and she may have understood that He was facing death.
- But to suggest she understood she was anointing His body for burial may be assuming too much.
- What is obvious---however---is that she put thought into her gift---and it meant a great deal to Jesus.
- In fact---He said what she did for Him would never be forgotten---that wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world---her lovely act would be remembered.
- Sadly---many of our expressions of love are not long remembered.
- But if they are given extravagantly---at the opportune moment ---with the needs and desires of the one receiving our love foremost in mind---they will at least be noted.
- And our love should be noted.
- In fact---Jesus said:
- “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)
- Let’s learn from Mary’s gift---and let’s express our love for Jesus---and for each other---in ways that make it stand out like a rose among thorns.