

26 March 2024  
Holy Tuesday Vespers

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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Holy Tuesday Meditation  
Text: Mark 14:1-11

Many people want to make a name for themselves. They want people to remember them after they die. That is how they will live on - in the hearts and minds of people, with their admiration and esteem. But we have seen in recent years how poor and fickle that can be. Those whose names were once synonymous with great deeds are now having their names expunged and their memorials cast down. What was once considered great and noteworthy is no longer. Those once considered heroic are now deemed shameful. Very few are those who will be able to survive such a purge.

But we heard of such a one tonight. Oh, Mark doesn't tell us her name. Maybe he didn't know it. But her heroic deed and her faithful witness lives on still, as Jesus said it would. Joseph of Arimathea was the one who took the body of Jesus down from the cross and placed it in his own new tomb, but it was this woman who had anointed Jesus' body for that burial two days before. This woman who gave a flask of very costly ointment, worth an entire year's wages, to her Saviour. *Why would she do such a thing?* Only because she had received a gift far more valuable *from* Jesus - the gift of forgiveness and life. And so she who had been made beautiful by her Saviour, did, as Jesus said, ***a beautiful thing***.

But there is ugliness in the words we heard tonight, too. The ugly words of those who want ***to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him***. The ugly words of those who criticize and scold this woman for wasting this expensive gift on Jesus. The ugly words of Judas Iscariot, who offers to betray Jesus to those who want Him dead. Those for whom Jesus is not beautiful are not beautiful and do not do beautiful. Those for whom Jesus is Saviour, are beautiful and do beautiful. This woman was not saved by her deed - she was saved by her Saviour, and her outpouring of love showed that.

*Do your deeds?* Do your deeds flow from your Saviour, from his forgiveness and life? Sometimes, perhaps. But we must confess, often no. Too often the ugly of our sin and sinful nature is what we do and what others see. Criticizing, scolding, betraying, even as we act piously, like those who thought a far better use of this ointment would have been to sell it and give the money to the poor. Lord, have mercy upon us!

And He does. It is why He was born. It is why He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper. It is why this woman anointed Him. It is why He died for ugly wretches like you and me. To mercy us. To make us beautiful. To wash us clean of our sin, that made beautiful, we do beautiful things. That we not worry about making a name for ourselves,

but proudly bear *His* Name. The Name He put upon us in our Baptism: Christian. And even if no one else remembers anything you did, Jesus does. Even the little things. The cup of cold water. The bite of food. The clothes for the cold. The visit of the lonely. For whatever, He says, you did *to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me* (Matthew 25:40).

So maybe instead of aspiring to make a name for ourselves, we should aspire to be like this woman - someone made beautiful by Jesus and so who does beautiful things. And if that brings criticism, scolding, betrayal, and worse, well, Jesus told us it would (John 15:18-16:4). We should not be surprised. But neither should that stop us. For those for whom Jesus is Saviour, are beautiful and do beautiful. Like this woman, it is just who we are, in Jesus.