

## HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!

Palm Sunday  
March 28, 2010  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church  
Hecla, SD

**Text: John 12:1-11** *Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box, and he used to take what was put in it. Then Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Then a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests took counsel that they might also put Lazarus to death, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.*

Theme: THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

- Putrid to those perishing
- Savory to our Savior

Dear fellow worshipers who have come waving your palm branches of faith and singing your hosannas to your Savior and King, Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed,

Have you ever noticed what a strong effect smells have on us? We avoid certain foods simply because of how they smell. The food may be great, but if it doesn't smell good, we're not going near it. My mother-in-law tells the story visiting Maine on a family vacation while she was pregnant. During their visit they had a delicious dinner which included fresh Maine lobster. Certainly a treat for anyone! But being as she was pregnant she did not enjoy the lobster for very long. Because of this, for the next 15 years she could not stand the thought of eating lobster. What should have been an inviting smell turned out to be nauseating for her because of her past experience.

So it is that the same smell will have different affects on different people. To one the smell of sauerkraut is nasty, to the other it is a most inviting odor. We find a similar reaction in today's text. As smells affect us differently, so was the case with the act of worship which Mary did for her Lord. Let us therefore consider the fragrance of Christian worship, how it is putrid odor to those who are perishing, but it is a savory odor to our Savior. May the Holy Spirit help us by His Word to rightly examine our hearts and follow the voice of our Good Shepherd. Amen.

PUTRID TO THOSE PERISHING

I imagine most of us are quite familiar with the Palm Sunday account. We heard it in our Gospel lesson this morning, we sang of it in our hymns, and our children have studied it in Sunday School. Our sermon text, though, takes us to the day prior to Palm Sunday. Jesus and His disciples are in Bethany being served supper at the home of Simon the leper. Involved with preparing the dinner are three people we heard of last week - Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha.

Notice how each has a different way of worshiping the Lord. Lazarus who had been dead, but had been raised by Jesus, we are told sat at the table with Jesus silently listening to the voice of His Savior. Martha, as we have become accustomed to seeing her, was busy preparing the meal to serve her Lord in that way. And we are reminded of the different ways in which Christians can serve the Lord in worship. Sometimes it is in silent contemplation, as Lazarus did. Other forms of worship can include serving the Lord. While we have never been involved with a dinner party for Jesus, we are reminded by Jesus that Christians do indeed feed Him, clothe Him, and give Him to drink when He tells us, ***“inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”*** (Mt 25:40)

But our text really focuses our attention on Mary. How does Mary worship her Lord? ***“Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.”*** In the course of the meal Mary showed her love and faith in Jesus. She had in her possession a very valuable perfume oil. Oil of spikenard, a plant that is native to India and China. We learn from Judas that the value of this pound of perfume was nearly a year’s wages - 300 denarii. But Mary’s love and faith in Jesus saw no dollar amount as being too much to spend on her Lord. This was her act of worship, to bestow on her Lord this valuable possession. Notice also her humility. Foot cleaning was often reserved for only the lowliest of servants. Yet Mary is glad not only to anoint the feet of Jesus with this costly oil, but to wipe them clean with her hair.

There is no way to hide Mary’s act of worship as the fragrance of this perfume fills the house. We hear of Judas’ supposed outrage, ***“Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”*** In English this comes across as innocent enough of a question from Judas. Yet the way Judas phrased this question, he wasn’t asking to learn, but he was asking in a judgmental and demeaning why. *Jesus! WHY did you allow this waste to happen? WHY didn’t you instead insist that it be sold and the money given to the poor!*

To Judas, Mary’s worship of Jesus was a foolish waste of money. The fragrance of her worship was putrid to Judas. The Holy Spirit through John reveals why it was such an offensive odor to Judas. ***“This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.”*** Judas loved money more than he loved the worship of Jesus. And it would be his love of money that would cause him to betray Jesus.

To those who are perishing the fragrance of Christian worship will always be a putrid or offensive odor. Given the option, the world sees more value in making money than clearing your schedule every Sunday morning to go to church. Those who are perishing think it is a waste to spend all that money on gas driving to Hecla, when there are plenty of other churches closer to our homes. To top it off, we give our hard earned money in support of the Gospel ministry. The world views that as a waste. And, like Judas, sometimes the argument is couched in pseudo-sympathy for the poor. “Why not give that money to those who really need it? Like orphans in Africa or earthquake victims in Haiti?” Unbelievers view Christian worship as a useless waste of

time. After all, they figure, how did hearing and learning God's word ever help the homeless find a place to stay or the unemployed get a job. To them, Christian worship is an offensive odor.

### SAVORY TO THE SAVIOR

What may be an offensive odor to one, may be a most welcoming and glorious smell to another. Think of the foods that you love, but others despise. In the end, you don't really care whether or not they like it, you love it and that's not going to change. Likewise we don't really care what the world thinks of our worship. We are not here for our own glory or to receive praise from men. We are assembled in God's House to hear His Word taught in its truth and purity and to worship and praise Him.

Judas' reaction is not what is important to us here, but Jesus' reaction. How does our Savior react to the fragrance emanating from Mary's worship? ***Then Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."*** To Jesus, the odor is most beautiful. The reason it is so savory to our Savior has nothing to do with the particular odor that comes from the oil of spikenard. Rather it is the fact that Mary's worship came from a heart of faith.

In Mark's account of the anointing we learn that Jesus said of Mary, ***"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of as a memorial to her."*** (Mk 14:9) This morning we have fulfilled this prophecy of Jesus. We remember this beautiful act of Christian worship done by Mary for her Lord. Worship that cared nothing for cost or for ego. She only desired to worship her Savior who would be dead and buried within a week. To our Savior, this act of worship by Mary produced a savory fragrance.

This causes us to wonder, how does our worship "smell" to our Savior? That depends on the attitude of our hearts, does it not. Why are you here this morning? Are you here because you "have to?" Are you here because you don't want the pastor to call on you and make you feel guilty for missing church? God is not interested in robotic worship - that is, He is not looking for thoughtless and heartless worship. If that was all God was interested in, He could have created donkeys in such a way that every Sunday morning at 9 am they would bray for an hour.

Instead Jesus tells us, ***"The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*** (Jn 4:23-24) This is the kind of worship God is looking for. People who worship Him in spirit and in truth. Believers who, led by the Holy Spirit, are eager and anxious to praise their God. Christians who want to gladly hear and learn His Word in truth and purity. Christians who value God and His Word above all else. Who, like Mary, are not concerned about the cost. They need to worship their Lord.

The form of Christian worship has always varied throughout the centuries. On this Palm Sunday we heard how people lined roads with palm branches and shouted their "hosannas" to Jesus as He rode a donkey into Jerusalem. In the early years of the New Testament church, the Christians had to gather for worship in homes and even in catacombs - underground burial sights - in order to avoid persecution. The order of Christian worship was not always the same as ours is today. That is, the Christians in Ephesus did not use page 5 in the front part of their hymnals.

But one thing has always remained true of Christian worship. It has always centered on the redemptive work of the Triune God. Jesus says of Mary's use of this costly oil, that she kept it for His burial. It was the death and burial of Jesus that rescued Mary and us from the eternal fires of hell. It was the death and burial of Jesus that brought us peace with God. It was the death and burial of Jesus that redeemed us unto God and opened heaven to us.

Led by the Holy Spirit, the Christian worships the God who saved him, in all that he does. On Sunday morning we assemble in God's house to be reminded and assured of the full and free atonement our Savior earned for us. We join our fellow Christian in worshipping our God and Savior in spirit and in truth. We take advantage of Bible Classes that are grounded in God's Word because, like Lazarus, we want to hear and learn more of what our Savior has done.

But our worship does not end when we leave God's house. All that we do as Christian, we do as an act of worship for our Savior. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and living sacrifices to God. We can worship our Savior by obeying our parents and cleaning our room when they tell us to. Like Martha, we can worship our Savior by serving our fellow Christian - whether it be visiting them in the hospital or taking them a meal when they are sick - in doing so we are serving our Savior. Such worship is savory to our Savior when, like Mary, it comes from a heart of faith. May the Holy Spirit ever help us to worship our Savior God in spirit and in truth. Amen!