

## **Sermon on John 12:1-8**

More than any of our other senses—the sense of smell connects us to our deepest memories. One whiff of a certain smell and we are instantly back into our past. I have many of my grandmother’s mixing bowls and baking pans. I can see them and I can feel them. When I mix up bread dough I can feel the bowl and the dough I’m mixing together, but it isn’t until I smell that bread baking that I’m transported back to my grandmother’s kitchen. I’m standing on her step stool and I’m begging her to teach me how to bake bread.

All I need to remember our family Easter dinners is to smell cloves and I can picture my mom’s ham and our family around the table. When I was a little girl my grandmother would dry day old bread for food for our barn cats on boards in the granary. In the fall we would also store apples there. To this day whenever I smell bread and apples together I’m back standing in our granary!

The power of smell can be overwhelming. A friend of mine told me once that she had been in the grocery store shopping a short time after her mother died. All of a sudden she was overpowered by the smell of the perfume her mother used to use. It was so strong that she expected to turn around and find her mother behind her, but when she did turn there was no one there. We joke in my family that when our parents come back from the dead to visit us it’ll be the smell of Ben gay that wafts through the house!

In our gospel reading today the smell of Mary’s expensive and lavish gift saturates not only the whole house, but also the minds of everyone there. It reminds them that just a few short weeks ago Lazarus had lain dead in the tomb

and that Jesus had raised him from the dead. This act of grace brought many to belief in Jesus, but it also sealed his fate as many began to plot his death. The sweet smell of the perfume contrasts Jesus' death and burial. The extravagant, beautiful gift contrasts an ugly death by crucifixion.

But this whole story is about contrasts—Mary and Judas contrasting true and false discipleship and lavish devotion contrasting critical stinginess. Here we have Mary modeling true discipleship. Her gift is beyond expensive it costs nearly a year's wages for a manual laborer. She gives her gift in a very personal, even scandalous way. She rubs the perfume into Jesus' feet and dries it with her hair. It is an expression of deep love and devotion that can't be ignored by those watching or considered ordinary. It is so unconventional that at least one of those watching has to interrupt.

Judas who feigns interest in the poor, but who we are told really just wants the money for himself. Judas who is one of Jesus' disciples and friends will later leave and betray Jesus to the chief priests and scribes for 30 pieces of silver. It is Mary who is the true disciple not Judas. It's Mary's act of service; of her being willing to become as a slave that parallels Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet at the Passover supper.

So does God's grace have a scent and if so what would it smell like to you? Would it smell like freshly baked bread or a loved one's favorite perfume? Would it smell like rotting garbage experienced on a life changing mission trip? Would it smell like the freshly painted house of an elderly friend? Would it fill your mind and your memories and never let you go?

Where has the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit impacted your life so deeply that it is like a scent we will never forget?