

Christ Church + Washington Parish  
The Rev. Cara Spaccarelli  
5th Sunday of Lent; John 12:1-11  
April 2nd, 2017

When Martha and Mary invited us to dinner, I advised Jesus that we shouldn't go. But we did. Jesus loved being with these three siblings - Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. It was unthinkable to turn down an invitation from them, particularly one that came in gratitude for the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. So we went. Martha had cooked up an amazing meal as always and we all chatted and laughed, and seeing Jesus there at table, well it was one of the few times I've seen him truly happy. His happiness made it easier to ignore the elephant in the room. But the elephant smelled, and that made it impossible to forget.

Lazarus smelled. Not as bad as he had when he had come out of the tomb - he smelled horrendous then. The smell of infection and illness times ten. Now it had faded to a lingering odor. But having been there at the tomb the day he came out, it was impossible to not link every whiff to the smell of death. And death was the elephant in the room we were all ignoring.

Suffering and death was something Jesus made a lot of references to, but we disciples thought we could create some distance between us and the inevitable. Keep Jesus away from the authorities so they wouldn't feel threatened by him. Try to keep his miracles on the down low so the authorities wouldn't know his power. But raising Lazarus from the dead after four days blew any attempt at the latter. That kind of news travels fast and wide. And Jesus insistence on staying just outside of Jerusalem, well there was no way to keep off the authorities' radar so close to the epicenter of political and religious activity. There was no question what the

authorities in Jerusalem would do if they decided Jesus had too much power and popularity. They'd kill him and probably all the people they found with him.

It's why I didn't want to come to dinner here - I wanted all of us to get as far from Jerusalem as possible. Bethany was way too close to danger. But here we were. And that smell coming from Lazarus in the room - it made it impossible to forget the death was closer than it had ever been.

The meal was over and the noise in the room had quieted down as people rested after the filling meal. No one would have probably noticed if the smell in the room hadn't suddenly changed.

With every inhale, it filled the body. I can't describe to you the smell - I wish I could - I remember it as the most wonderful smell in the world, like walking into a field of a thousand flowers, but I know that it was probably just the contrast to the smell of sores that had previously lingered in the room. It caused everyone's head to turn to Jesus.

There was Mary kneeling at his feet, an empty jar by her side, rubbing the feet of Jesus with a glistening ointment - the source of the beautiful smell. Complete silence as we all watched. Kings were anointed on the head, special guests were lavished with perfume on their upper body, and corpses, corpses were prepared for burial beginning with the anointing of feet. Mary, without words, named the elephant in the room. The silence in the room was as palpable as the smell. She dried his feet with her hair.

Jesus was at peace and so was Mary; it shown on their faces. I was filled with yearning. The desire for that peace - that peace that shown on Jesus and now on Mary - that peace is why I had first followed Jesus. He promised peace. And yet the days and weeks and months of journeying from place to place, of wondering where the next meal would come from, what threat to dodge next, how to get some rest from the crowds, and now as death loomed so close, the elusiveness of that peace that I so desired - it was just another reminder that physical death would not be the only tragedy if the authorities got to Jesus, it would be the death of that possibility of peace. The only thing I wanted.

Judas was the first to break the silence, criticizing Mary for wasting such an expensive item that could have been used to care for the poor. True it was worth probably a year's wages, but that's not what his outburst was about. All the disciples knew it. Jesus, by refusing to avoid the authorities and Jerusalem, was going to waste his life. His life would be better spent teaching, healing, giving hope to the poor, far from the danger of Jerusalem. He didn't have to do this. Certainly not now. He could wait until he had more support, could make more of a stand. If he insisted on a face-off now, he would be dead and his life and ministry would not even become a footnote. His power and his prophetic voice would all be wasted.

Jesus answered Judas, but it was Mary's face I watched. She didn't register either Judas or Jesus' remarks. Nothing shook her out of that peace.

In the face of death, she had still found peace. She knew what would happen to Jesus. She smelled death, and she had found peace. I didn't want the fear and frustration I was carrying; I wanted the love and dedication to serving that she carried in the face of death. I wanted the feeling of extravagant generosity that filled her in the face of impending loss. So I put it down. In that room. My insistence that we could avoid the suffering and death that was on our path by outsmarting it. My avoidance of the challenges of threats that are bound to come when you follow a prophet. My fear that the peace that I wanted would never come. I put it all down.

By the time we left Martha and Mary's house, the slight smell of Lazarus' death had returned, mixing with the remnants of the smell of perfume from Mary's anointing. As we left, I didn't turn around. I had left too much there with the elephant in the room, and I only wanted to look forward, to see in what ways I could love and serve more generously in the path ahead.