

Sermon: *The Smell of Love*
Text: *John 12:1 – 8*
Date: *March 21, 2010 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Down in the middle of the Pecan Orchard in Bainbridge, you'll find a little African-American club called Breedlove's. Now, Mr. Breedlove liked my granddaddy. Granddaddy was a Methodist preacher and a Captain on the Police Force in Bainbridge. And every now and then, for some odd reason, Mr. Breedlove needed a policeman and he always asked for "*Captain Mac.*"

Now, every Christmas, usually on Christmas Eve, there would be a knock at the backdoor of my grandparent's house and when we opened the door, we'd always find ... Mr. Breedlove with his arms full and every Christmas, the gift was the same ... a bottle of wine and a case of beer. And I just couldn't understand that because granddaddy didn't drink. So I asked grandma: "*Why does that man always bring granddaddy a case of beer and a bottle of wine?*" And she said: "*Because Mr. Breedlove loves your granddaddy.*"

It has become a holiday tradition. When we see the red kettle and hear the bells ringing, we know it's almost Christmas. Mom Lovejoy spent the early years of her ministry as a Salvation Army Officer. And Lori talks about playing her horn beside the kettles as a teenager. During college, I spent two Christmases, working for the Salvation Army in Knoxville, Tennessee. That's where I met Mr. Thompson. He was a business man in Knoxville and one of owners of Thompson Boling Arena where the University of Tennessee played basketball. Well, Mr.

Thompson was also the Chair of the Advisory Board and he gave a lot of his time and energy and money to the Army. And one night, when I was alone with the Major, I asked him: "*Major, why is Mr. Thompson so generous. He's always doing something nice for us.*" And he said: "*Because Mr. Thompson loves God.*"

In our text, John tells us the story of Jesus' trip to Bethany. It seems He spent a lot of time there during the last week of His life. And one day, when He and the disciples were eating at Mary and Martha's house, Mary came and knelt at His feet and broke open a jar of expensive perfume and poured it over Jesus' feet and wiped them dry with her hair. And John says Judas was outraged. He said: "*We could have sold that perfume and given the money to the poor.*" But Jesus delighted in her generosity and saw it as an expression of her love and devotion.

That's basically what this story is about. It's about Mary's love and devotion for Jesus! And there are several things that I notice about her love.

First, Mary's Love Seems Extravagant! John tells the perfume Mary used was made of pure nard. And in Judas' estimation, it was worth about 300 denarii. Now, a denarius was one day's wage. And considering that the Jews didn't work on the Sabbath that means this jar of perfume was worth a year's salary. Now, think about that. If I worked 40 hours a week at minimum wage, that jar of perfume would have cost over \$14,800 in today's money. That's extravagant!

How extravagant is your love? Sarah had worked diligently putting the kids to bed and she was standing at the kitchen sink finishing up the dishes when the phone rang. And the voice on the other end said: *“Mrs. Johnson, we have your husband. Now, if you’re very careful and do exactly as we say, he’ll be home for supper tomorrow night. What you need to do is: go down to the bank first thing in the morning and withdraw a million dollars, put it in a brief case, and wait for further instructions.”* She said: *“A million dollars! He ain’t worth a million dollars! Would you settle for \$10,000?”* Now, friends, that’s not extravagant love.

I wonder sometimes what God thinks of my expressions of love and adoration. Sometimes you and I are more content to give God second best than very best. Sometimes we’re content to give God our leftovers instead of our first fruits. Sometimes our love and commitment to God is more about what we can get from Him than what we can give to Him. Is that extravagance?

We could learn a lot from Mary’s love!

Second, Mary’s Love Seems a Little Silly! I mean, just look at this scene again. Jesus is sitting on the floor, leaning against the table and in walks Mary and she opens a jar of perfume, pours it on His feet, and wipes it dry with her hair. Doesn’t that seem a little strange to you? I mean, couldn’t she have found another way of expressing her love and affection for Jesus?

You know, few things in the world are sillier than two people in love. They way they look at one

another! The way they giggle when they're together! The little things they do to get one another's attention! It's almost sickening. You see, two lovers sitting on a park bench, kissing; they don't even care that you're on the planet, but you're thinking: "*Will you please go get a motel room or something?*"

Listen: love seems silly to everyone ... except lovers. Everybody else in the room might have been repulsed by Mary's actions, but Jesus was touched! In fact, when Luke tells this story, he records Jesus as saying: "*When I came in you didn't even wash my feet, but this woman has not stopped washing my feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. You didn't kiss me, but she has not stopped kissing my feet. That's why I tell you her sins are forgiven. Her great love proves that.*"

I wonder sometimes what God thinks about my love. You know, sometimes our love is so orderly and predictable. We're so reserved in our expressions of love and affection. We really don't want to do anything that would cause others to think that we're radical. Some are afraid to sing, because they don't want to be heard singing out of tune; that's just too silly. Some are afraid to say, "Amen," or "Hallelujah," or raise their hands, because those expressions just don't seem natural. And we wouldn't want to look silly, would we?

O friends, we could learn a lot from Mary's love!

Third, Mary's Love Was Extensive!
John tells us: "**The smell of the perfume filled the entire house.**" Now, granted, Jewish homes in the First Century were no where near the size of yours and

mine, but I think John is trying to tell us something significant here. He's saying, "*Mary loved Jesus and everybody in the house knew it.*" In fact, in Matthew's version of this story, Jesus says: "*I can guarantee you this: wherever this Good News is spoken in the world, she will be honored for what she had done.*"

A few weeks ago, I told you the story of how Lori and I started dating. Well, Asbury College is a very conservative school. And they have what the students lovingly call "*The Blue Zone.*" Now, certain things are acceptable within the Blue Zone and some things are not. For example, short pants are not acceptable in the Blue Zone; and Public Displays of Affection are not acceptable in the Blue Zone. In fact, Asbury is known for their "Six Inch Rule," you must be at least six inches from a person of the opposite sex at all times. And so, Lori and I were dating and I began to notice something. She wouldn't hold my hand in public and she never put her arm around me in public. And I began to wonder, "*Is she ashamed of me or what?*" I wasn't even sure all of her friends knew we were dating.

But Mary didn't have that problem! Everybody in the house knew about Mary's love. And here we are, 2000 years later, reflecting on Mary's love.

I wonder sometimes what God thinks about my love. We're so quite about our love and affection! Everybody knows what football team we root for. We proudly announce our love and affection for our kids and grandkids and the other great loves of our lives. But we can be really quite about the thing that matters

most. After all, it's kinda embarrassing to talk about your faith, to let people know where you stand with Jesus Christ. But I'm reminded of what Jesus said: **"If you're ashamed of me when you stand before men, I will be ashamed of you when I stand before the Father."**

O friends, we could learn a lot from Mary's love.

You know, friends, maybe Mary's love seems a little extravagant; maybe Mary's love seems a little silly; maybe Mary's love seems a little extensive, but maybe ... just maybe the reason it seems that way is that we don't understand what it really means to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We don't know the cost of the oil in Mary's Alabaster Box.