

## The Fragrance of Worship

### John 12:1-8

#### Introduction

- Have you noticed that there are fragrances associated with the Holiday Seasons?
  - Places like: Yankee Candle, Bath and Body Works, and Panera Bread make a lot of money off these fragrances
    - Pumpkin Spice Candles scream Fall and Thanksgiving
    - Pumpkin-Spice Latte's provide a feeling of warmth from the cold
    - The scent of Pine smells like a freshly cut Christmas Tree
    - Gingerbread may bring back memories of baking and decorating
  - For many, these fragrances are therapeutic
    - They soothe the soul
    - They invite special memories from years past
    - They help us come into the moment of the Season amidst all the other things going on around us.
- In light of Thanksgiving, we are focusing on the topic of Worship
  - Did you know that worship has a fragrance too?
  - Throughout the Old Testament, God commands his people to offer burnt offerings as sacrifices with a pleasing aroma to the Lord.
    - In fact, for the grain offering, the priests were to pour oil and frankincense on the flour to create a pleasing aroma to the Lord (Leviticus 2:1-3)
    - God required the people to make a sacrifice as a way of showing thankfulness, and also repentance.
  - A similar theme can be found in The New Testament, for example, **Revelation 5:8, "And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."**
- This fragrance, or aroma was not just the physical smell that was pleasing to the Lord, but it was a metaphor for God's people to reflect on their obedience to God.
  - At times, the people would offer up sacrifices out of habit, and yet God would not find their offering pleasing.
  - The offering had as much to do with the heart in which it was offered as the ingredients included in the offering.
- So, in light of this quick little introduction, how do you think God would describe your fragrance of worship?
- As you reflect on that question, let's take a look at a story found in **John 12**
  - The setting of the story is that it is six days before Passover; six days before Jesus will be crucified
  - He is working his way to Jerusalem, but just before he gets there he enters into the town of Bethany
  - Bethany is a familiar place to Jesus. His good friends, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus live there.

- You may recall Jesus' connection with this family.
  - Mary and Martha are the sisters who Jesus visited earlier in Luke 10. Martha got upset with her sister, Mary, for spending more time with Jesus instead of helping Martha set the table for dinner.
  - Lazarus is the brother of Mary and Martha, who in the previous chapter became ill and died. Together, with Jesus, they mourned Lazarus' death, and then Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.
- Once again, Jesus enters into the home of his good friends, and once again, Mary creates a scene by the way she approaches Jesus.
- Let's pick up the story **John 12:1-8**
  - The key verse is **John 12:3b**
  - In other words, "The house was filled with the fragrance of worship."
  - Here's the question for us:
    - How do we fill our lives with the fragrance of worship?
    - How do we not just fill our sanctuary's on Sunday's with the fragrance of worship, but how do we fill everyday with the fragrance of worship?
  - Mary's approach provides us with an answer to this question.

### The Fragrance of Worship is Acquired through the Heart

- My story of acquiring a taste for coffee
  - I didn't start drinking coffee until about 3 years ago.
  - I had tried coffee several times as a kid, but just could not get over the bitter taste.
  - Three years ago, it was about this time of year, Amy and I were at Panera Bread, sitting around the fire there at a booth.
  - I got this desire for a Pumpkin Spice Latte
    - As I mentioned earlier those latte's are seasonal
    - I thought maybe if the coffee had some added flavor it would taste good
  - So began my addiction to coffee.
    - Like many of you, the first thing I do when I wake up is turn on the coffee pot
    - I drink at least two cups of coffee every morning
  - But now, that I've acquired a taste for coffee, I like my coffee black without anything added.
  - An approach to worship is similar; the fragrance of worship is acquired through the heart.
- Mary always seems to cause a scene when Jesus shows up
  - Why can't she be like everyone else and just go with the flow?
    - Martha is doing her thing; serving. We know how she feels when Mary gets into one of these fits when Jesus shows up.
    - Mary did two things that would have embarrassed the people around her
      - There's the obvious act of bowing down before Jesus, and anointing his feet

- If that wasn't bad enough, she had to let down her hair in public and wipe Jesus' feet.
    - During ancient times, it was not considered polite for a woman to let her hair down in public.
  - Notice, though, that it is not Martha who speaks against Mary.
    - Maybe she has learned her lesson from the last time!
    - Jesus' words, "you are anxious and troubled about many things." (Luke 10:41)
  - No, it's Judas who speaks up
    - He tries to take the self-righteous route- "Mary the money you spent on the perfume could have been given to the poor." (John 12:5)
    - The perfume could have been sold for 300 denarii. One denarius was equal to one day's worth of wages. So, this jar of perfume would have equaled almost a year's worth of wages. That's a lot of money for perfume!
    - There's a problem with Judas' response. Deep down Judas is a thief, and he will soon betray Jesus.
- It's not that Mary tries to create a scene every time Jesus shows up.
  - Her intention is not to be noticed by everyone else, nor is it to show other people up.
  - For Mary, worship is not about what she does, but more of where her worship comes from.
  - Mary understands who Jesus is. She gets that Jesus is her Savior. She understands that without Jesus she would have nothing, and she is willing to risk what she has to worship Jesus.
    - She put pride away when she lets her hair down; she's unashamed.
    - She holds nothing back. Time with Jesus is priceless-the cost of the perfume is not about her, but about the one she is coming to worship.
    - We learn in the next chapter that washing someone's feet is reserved for a servant.
      - While Martha is concerned about serving the meal, Mary is concerned about serving her Master through worship.
      - While Judas is concerned about his own investments, Mary is concerned about investing in Jesus.
- This kind of worship does not come natural, it is acquired from the heart
  - It's acquired in a "pumpkin-spice latte" kind of way, through a transformational experience
  - Mary's response to Jesus is similar to the Woman at the Well's response when she left her water jar to tell all the towns people about what Jesus had done.

- Mary wasn't concerned with all the other things that people were, that gets in the way of our worship.
  - The aroma that filled the room was a pleasing fragrance of worship to Jesus
- On the other hand, the fragrance of worship that Martha and Judas offered was not pleasing!
  - It might even reflect the kind of worship we offer
  - Self-serving, just going through the motions is not worship that is pleasing to God.
  - Our fragrance of worship is acquired through the heart, that is experiencing a transformational relationship with Jesus Christ.

### The Fragrance of Worship is a Witness to Others

- When we lived in Parkersburg I would often run from Parkersburg South High School to Market Street.
  - The high school is on a big hill off of Blizzard Drive
  - Going down the hill is not too much of a problem, but coming up the hill was a challenge!
  - So, when I would come back, I'm a little more fatigued than when I started. If I can just get over the hill I'll be done.
  - Well, as I approached the hill, there's a McDonald's on the right side, there in the Kroger shopping center.
  - If the wind caught things just right, this smell of French Fries would just hit me right in the face as I was preparing to go up the hill.
  - It was bad enough that I was trying to stay focused on overcoming the hill, but then I would have to compete with wanting to just stop all together and order French fries!
  - My focus was shot! All I could think about was French Fries!
- A similar thing happens to us on Sunday mornings.
  - Lots of times as I'm driving from my house to the church, my mind is on everything else, but God
  - You might be able to relate: you are concerned about something in your life, maybe you are angry at someone, or maybe consumed with a special interest and church is the last obstacle between what you have to do and what you want to do.
  - It could be that we come to church to get focused, and then once we leave we immediately lose focus.
- Here's what we can learn from Mary's worship: Mary's worship became a witness to the people around her.
  - Did Martha get distracted?
    - Anxious
    - Troubled
  - Was Judas distracted?
    - Money

- Self-interest
      - Mary always seems to be focused on what is most important: Jesus
  - The Apostle Paul used the Old Testament concept of fragrant offering to describe the kind of witnesses we should be
    - 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”
    - Remember our key verse; John 12:3, “The house was filled with the fragrance of perfume, (or worship).”
    - So part of what we are trying to understand today is; “How can we fill our lives with the fragrance of worship every day?”
      - The triumphal procession of Christ
        - Keep in mind that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem-the triumphal entry
        - It’s really the way to the cross-victory over sin and death
        - When we let Christ take the lead in our life, then we proceed in triumph
        - Our testimony becomes our worship
      - To some it’s the fragrance of death, to others the fragrance of life
        - Some people will accept our witness, others will reject it
        - But, there’s no denying who goes before us- in other words there’s no denying what our life is really about
  - Have you ever met someone who just seems to “ooze” of Jesus?
    - It’s the person who just always seems to be positive
    - The person who treats everyone the same way
    - The person who shares grace and compassion
    - You might describe someone like this by saying, “There’s something different about that person.”
  - When our lives are focused on Jesus, then our fragrance of worship is a witness to others. It fills the room that we are in.

#### The Fragrance of Worship comes from time well spent with Jesus

- I don’t remember where I heard or read this story, but if I understood it correctly, Ruth Graham, the wife of the evangelist Billy Graham, used to take one of his shirts and keep it nearby whenever Billy was away on preaching trip.
  - The shirt carried his scent
  - Even though Billy was not be physically present, his scent gave Ruth comfort that he was nearby.

- There is an important connection that needs to be made between the first verse of this chapter and the last two
  - **John 12:1**
    - The Passover is near
    - Jesus will soon be on the cross
    - The fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, points toward the hope that he too will raise from the dead.
    - Mary makes the most of this moment by expressing her devotion through worship.
  - **John 12:7-8**
    - Jesus recognizes Mary's devotion beyond just the moment, but sees the day when the Son will glorify the Father
    - At that point, not only will Mary worship Jesus with perfume, but the whole world will recognize Jesus as the Son of God!
- The Fragrance of Worship comes from time well spent with Jesus
  - Mary did not want to leave Jesus' side
  - She wasn't in a rush for the dinner to begin
  - She wasn't worried about how the table mats were positioned
  - Her sole focus was on Jesus, and the time she had with him
  - Remember how the townspeople in Samaria responded to Jesus after the testimony from the Woman at the Well, **"So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days."** (John 4:40)
  - The Fragrance of Worship remains when you and I remain in the presence of God.
    - Notice the consistency with which Mary approaches Jesus
    - She's constantly at his feet
      - In Luke 10 she was sitting at his feet as he taught
      - In John 12 she was bowing at his feet in worship
    - Mary has acquired a heart for worship, her worship is a witness to others, because of time well spent with Jesus
- The Apostle Paul puts Jesus' sacrifice into perspective for us
  - **Ephesians 5:2, "And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**
  - The truth is, we have nothing that we can offer to God as a pleasing aroma
  - Anything we offer from ourselves smells like pride, selfishness, arrogance, etc.
  - Remember the grain offering that God commanded his people to give back in the Book of Leviticus?
    - It needed to be mixed with oil and frankincense to be a pleasing aroma
    - We've got to take the brokenness that is us, and wrap it in the love of Christ
    - The sacrifice that Christ made for us on the cross, was a pleasing aroma to the Father.
    - It's the fragrance of love, grace, hope, and truth.

- How do you think God would describe your fragrance of worship?
  - Have you acquired the heart of worship?
  - Is your worship a witness to others?
  - Have you spent quality time with Jesus?
- “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.” 2 Corinthians 2:14