

# “Doing the Stuff”

Mark 14:1-11 <sup>1</sup>

I’ve probably told you that my Mom was the Director of Religious Education at the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, North Carolina during World War II. My Dad was stationed in Wilmington in the Navy, and it was at the First Baptist Church that they met.

Several years ago, a young man made a commitment to become a follower of Jesus at the First Baptist Church of Wilmington, and he soon became eagerly involved in the new world of church activities. After a few weeks, he asked one of the staff, “When are we going to start doing the stuff?”

The staff member responded, “What stuff?” and the young man answered, “**When are we going to do the stuff that Jesus did?**” That question provoked a good bit of soul searching at First Baptist Wilmington.

How would you answer that young man’s question if it were posed about Columbia Baptist Fellowship: “When are we going to start doing the stuff?” I want to think with you briefly this morning about what it might mean to “Do the Stuff” here and now that Jesus did long ago. We’ll begin by looking at a poignant vignette that begins Mark’s Passion Narrative.

In Mark’s telling of the story, the events in today’s text took place on Wednesday afternoon and evening of Passion Week. Mark tells us that two days before the important festival of Passover, the Temple leaders were actively looking for a way do away with Jesus, but they were afraid of inciting riots during a week when Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims from all over the world, many of whom supported Jesus.

Tensions were high, not unlike this anxious season in our own country, and the leaders really wanted to find a way to kill Jesus quietly, rather like the Saudis thought they were doing when they murdered Jamal Khashoggi a couple of weeks ago. At first, the Temple leaders probably planned to wait until the festival was over and people started to go home before they made their move, but Judas’ treachery changed their calculations.

In today’s text, Mark moves from this opening statement about treachery to an account of a memorable meal in Bethany, and then ends the segment with a bookend about Judas’ betrayal. John describes this dinner as taking place on the Saturday before Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem, and that is likely the real chronology. Mark moved the meal to Wednesday for dramatic effect, sandwiching it between treachery and betrayal as a way of emphasizing how dreadful those actions really were.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on November 4, 2018. Parallel passages include Matthew 26:2-16; Luke 22:1-6; John 12:1-8.

Sources for this sermon include: Barclay, William, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); Culpeper, Alan, “Mark,” *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); Garland, David E. “Mark,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lane, William, “The Gospel According to Mark,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Turlington, Henry, “Mark,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969); Wessell, Walter, “Mark,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Digital Version; Williamson, Lamar, Jr., “Mark,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, digital version.

<sup>2</sup> Some ancient commentators thought there were three anointings: the first in Galilee (Luke 7:36-50); the second on Saturday before the Triumphant Entry (John 12:2-8); and the third on Wednesday of that week (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9). The most likely scenario is that there were two anointings. The first (Luke’s) took place in Galilee; the second took place on Saturday (John), but was described by Matthew and Mark as taking place on Wednesday for narrative and theological reasons.

Mark tells us that this anointing took place in Bethany at the home of Simon the Leper. Bethany was the home of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus, whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead, and the three of them were at the dinner, which appears to have been attended by Jesus' close friends and associates.

While Mark doesn't actually say that Simon was present, it seems reasonable to think that Jesus had healed Simon of his leprosy and that the dinner was an expression of gratitude for that healing.<sup>3</sup> During the dinner, a woman Mark doesn't name makes an extravagant and extraordinary gift of love to Jesus, and John tells us that the woman was Mary, Lazarus' sister.

During the meal, Mary took *an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume of pure nard*, broke it open, and poured some of it on Jesus' head. John noted that Mary also *anointed Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair* (John 12:3).

This perfume was made from the root of a plant imported from India and was very expensive. John noted that the perfume could have been sold for the equivalent of a year's income for a farm worker, estimated by commentators to be about \$12,000. This was truly extraordinary, and people in the room murmured their shock and displeasure at what they regarded as unforgivable waste.

In those days, spices and ointments were frequently used as investments because they were small, portable, and easily sold, much like investing in gold might be today. This perfume, then, probably represented Mary's life savings, and could legitimately be compared with the "widow's mite" from Tuesday's experiences in the Temple (Mark 12:41-44).

Not only was the expense extravagant, but Mary's loosening her hair to wipe Jesus' feet was also extraordinary. In those days, women never let their hair down in public, and Mary may have allowed herself this unusual act of devotion because of the intimacy of the group. The whole scene was rather shocking, and the group began to scold Mary for such behavior.

Jesus scolded back: "*Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a noble thing for me. You always have the poor with you, and you can do what is good for them whenever you want, but you do not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body in advance for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her*" (Mark 14:6-9).<sup>4</sup>

Mary may or may not have had this deeper meaning in mind, but she did have a record of being unusually perceptive. It's clear, though, that all the men were clueless.

Jesus, of course, knew what was ahead, and that awful ordeal was on His mind all the time. He knew that the customary anointing and care for the body of the deceased would not be accorded to Him after He had been executed like a common criminal. Jesus acknowledged and appreciated Mary's act of extravagant devotion, and that acceptance indicated to the group that He was worthy of such love and expense—an implicit acknowledgement of His divinity.

---

<sup>3</sup> I feel a certain kinship to biblical "lepers." The term does not refer to modern leprosy, or Hansen's Disease, but rather to any "serious skin disease," as it is usually translated these days. I've had dyshidrotic eczema pretty much all my life, and it has often caused me to be "outside the camp" as was the case in ancient days (Leviticus 13:45-46).

<sup>4</sup> Jesus was not relieving His followers of caring for the poor, which had always been a central theme of His ministry (Luke 4:18-19a) and will be a criterion of future judgment (Matthew 25:31-46; cp. Deuteronomy 15:4-5). He was pointing out that the time for caring for the dead is more time sensitive.

For several reasons, perhaps, Judas was so offended by all this that he left the gathering, went to the Temple, and offered to betray Jesus to the authorities. Luke commented that “*Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, who was numbered among the Twelve*” (Luke 22:3).<sup>5</sup> Luke had previously pointed out that after Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, “*Satan departed from him for a time*” (Luke 4:13); and the moment to strike had come.<sup>6</sup>

Well, that’s our text. I want to shift our focus just a bit to wonder why Mary loved Jesus so, and why people flocked to hear Jesus teach by the thousands. I think people were attracted to Jesus because **Jesus loved them**, and they knew it.

Jesus loved ordinary people, sick people, outcast people, poor people, even dishonest people, and He loved being with them. If you look at the record, Jesus chose to spend most of His time with “socially unacceptable” people rather than with those who thought themselves “religious,” and this was so obvious that the religious leaders mockingly called Jesus “*the friend of sinners*” (Luke 7:34), a title Jesus wore proudly. I wonder how many people would say such a thing about you or about me? And that brings us back to “Doing the Stuff.”

Jesus called people to repent and then He sent those who followed Him out into the world to do the same kinds of things (to “Do the Stuff”), saying, “*I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works (the “Same Stuff”) I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father*” (John 14:12).

So what sort of “Stuff” might Jesus be wanting us to do here at CBF? I don’t know all that God is up to, but I’m pretty sure God intends for us to make a measurable difference for God’s Kingdom right here in Oakland Mills. I’m pretty sure God intends for us to be “Doing the Stuff” here in Columbia and in our region. And I’m pretty sure that God intends for us to be involved in meaningful ways in “Doing the Stuff” in various places all around our world.

An examination of the four Gospels quickly reveals that Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God more than any other subject,<sup>7</sup> and when Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, He wasn’t talking about a geographical area such as the land of Israel. He wasn’t talking about a political entity such as the nation of Israel. He wasn’t even talking about a group of people such as His disciples or the Church. When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, He was talking about a realm in which the lost would be found, where the dead would be brought back to life, and where the Father’s House would resound with joyful celebration!

My friends, do you want to live in a world where God’s will is truly done, where all people are governed in righteousness, and where “*the earth [is] filled with the knowledge of the*

---

<sup>5</sup> Modern readers usually want to know more why Judas betrayed Jesus than why the woman was so generous. Mark offers no motive at all for the betrayal. Luke tells us that Satan entered Judas (Luke 22:3). According to Matthew, greed was the chief motive (Matthew 26:15). In John’s Gospel, Judas is identified as a thief concerned about money (John 12:6) and as one in league with Satan (13:2).

In view of John 12:6 it is often suggested that the motive was nothing more complicated than lust for money, yet this seems improbable in view of the modest size of the bribe, the subsequent return of the money (27:3), and the fact that Judas had doubtlessly already made a considerable financial sacrifice by leaving all to follow Jesus. Others propose that Judas was angered by his master’s refusal to assume the role of a conquering hero, but Jesus’ posture must have been obvious from the beginning in view of his teaching about nonresistance and love for enemies (5:38-48). Yet another proposal is that Judas hoped to compel a miraculous event of redemption by forcing God to come to Jesus’ aid. The Gospels are less interested in such speculations than we are.

<sup>6</sup> It’s also important to remember that Satan didn’t understand what he was really doing. As Paul later put it, “*None of the rulers of this age knew this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*” (1 Corinthians 2:8).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase “Kingdom of God” appears 162 times in the New Testament, and 126 of these times it was spoken by Jesus.

*LORD as the waters cover the sea?*" (Isaiah 11:9). I'll bet you do, and the way to get there from here is to do two things:

**TRUST:**       *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5-6).<sup>8</sup>

**OBEY:** *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all [God's] commands"* (Matthew 28:19-20; John 15:14). If we make this goal, which has to do with the establishment of the Kingdom of God, our primary concern, God's power will be set free in us, and we will begin to live the adventure to which we have been called, both individually and together.

Well, I'm almost done, but there's one more thing we need to see in our text before we're through. Mary poured out a year's wages to show her love for Jesus, and that was the only loving, kind thing that was done to or for Him that whole week. Something of great value was poured out, and Jesus connected that pouring with His own death.

There was another, deeper meaning to this poignant scene. The next night, Jesus would tell His disciples that His own blood was about to be "poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). Mary's gift of perfume foreshadowed an incomparably greater pouring out, a pouring out that also appeared to many to be wasted . . . .

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all* (Isaiah 53:5-6). And so we come to the Table. . . .

---

<sup>8</sup> See also Psalm 9:10, 13:5, 20:7, 22:4, 25:1, 37:5, 56:3, 91:2, 118:8, 119:66, 125:1; Isaiah 30:15; Nahum 1:7; and Romans 15:13.