

So I'm really excited because for the first time since 2014, the University of Minnesota hockey team is going to the Frozen Four. No matter where I have lived, I follow Gopher hockey. It is without question my number one team. So you can join in my joy or at least, pray for me because this week, I'll be a bundle of nerves watching my favorite team try to win a title. And you have my grandpa to thank for that. Because he introduced me and my family to Gopher hockey many, many years ago and it's been a love of mine ever since. He passed away a while back, but this is his hat that he wore to every game. I see it and I immediately picture how he wore it – always kind of high on the top of his head. I see it and I can practically smell the cologne he used to wear. It's the hat that floods my senses with memories.

I'm sure you all have similar things in your life, people and places and things that the moment you see them, fill your brain with all kinds of memories and emotions and feelings. And it seems as though you're transported back across time and distance. Often times, this happens with smells, because it turns out that smell is one of the most powerful memory forming senses we have. Psychologists call this the Proust Effect, which is the most I want to say about how that works and is simply just a fun piece of information should you ever end up on a game show one day. There you go. Proust Effect.

But the reason I bring this up is because I'm fascinated with this story in the Gospel of John. Jesus is at his friend Lazarus' house, as are Martha and Mary. And it's truly a miracle they're all there because just a chapter prior, Lazarus was lying dead in a tomb. So you would imagine it's a pretty joyous occasion. Until Mary does something strange. She takes a pound of expensive nard perfume and pours it onto Jesus' feet. And then she wipes his feet clean with her hair, an act that was outrageously scandalous because, for women in the first century, hair was a symbol of pride and beauty, and thus was expected to be covered up. And now, like any bath and body works store, the whole house is filled with this fragrant perfume.

And it's natural to wonder, as Judas did, why? Why would Mary do such a thing? And why was Jesus so receptive of this intimate act? Maybe it has to do with the way smell forms memories. But maybe even more than that, it's a gracious act of one so indebted and devoted to another. That just as Mary learned from Jesus the ways of the kingdom, the ways of love and grace, now she demonstrates her understanding and gratitude. Because to have received such love and grace can only mean that we are forever changed by it. We are not the same once we have been covered in the fragrant perfume of the grace and love of God. It stays with us, filling our lives until we can't help but carry it with us.

And so I wonder, with so much perfume and a fragrance like nard, how long did it stay with Jesus? How long did it linger? Could he still smell it as he entered triumphantly into Jerusalem? As he shared the final meal with his disciples, did the scent come back to him? Or as he was arrested, amid all the smells of sweat and burning flame, could Jesus still sense the sweet smelling perfume? Did it waft up to him as he hung on the cross? Was he brought back to that moment? Did he remember the love and devotion that Mary showed him? Did it remind him of his calling, that he was the beloved Son of God, the Messiah, and that through his suffering and death he would save the world from death? Did the smell of perfume and the memories it brought back give him the comfort, courage, and the faith to boldly declare, "It is finished"?

And what about Mary? As Jesus passed her riding into Jerusalem, could she still smell the perfume? Could she sense the aroma lingering as Jesus was left abandoned, forced to carry his cross? Could she smell the costly perfume anointed upon her savior's body as it was carried into the tomb? Was she brought back to that house where it all began? Did it remind her of the power of Jesus to raise her brother back to life? Did the smell of the nard perfume fill her heart and soul with the love of Jesus once again? Did she know from its scent that in spite of other's complaining, she had done the right thing, even though it cost her so much? And as she poured out the perfume upon her Lord, its fragrance filling the room and flooding her memories, could she have known that it was the beginning of death's demise?

I don't think we're always aware of the impact we have on others. I doubt my grandpa knew that every time I see his hat, it's like he right here with me again. We can't always understand or know just how deeply the actions of our lives are taken in by another. But in every interaction, we have an opportunity to be people who speak life and hope and peace, like Mary. Whenever our lives cross paths with another's, we are invited to live more fully into our calling as disciples of Christ, to make the love of God known through our words and deeds, to be living testimonies of the grace that permeates this broken world.

Because this grace truly is out there. It shifts and moves and flows throughout the whole world. Christ's love is can be found and seen and known, in our midst. Like a precious perfume, it fills the earth, stirring within us memories of the goodness of God, reminding us that we are forever loved. It's the sweet smell of grace that calls us back to the one who made us as we are, the grace that leads us to into the future that has been promised. Such love and grace abounds in and through our lives, the things we say and do, the ways we encounter one another. So today, my friends in Christ, will we sense it? Will we perceive it? Will we live it? Amen.