“The Wise Woman”

Mark 14:3-9

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Her actions are wild and scandalous.

Breaking into that dinner party without invitation.

She busts through the door, paying no attention to the distress of the guests.

Ignoring their shocked faces as she makes her way in.

She goes to the table where Jesus and the other men are seated.

This unexpected intruder puts a halt to the relaxed dinner conversation.

Tension builds in the room.

Before a bouncer can escort her out, she breaks open that alabaster jar.

The aroma is unleashed into the room.

She takes the oil inside of the jar and pours it on Jesus’ head.

Anointing him in front of the dinner guests.

The hastiness of her action settles on all who are there.

They can’t find the words right away, unsure of how to react.

Have her arrested?

Kick her out of Jesus’ entourage?

Surely there would be consequences for such an egregious act.

I mean, this woman, who wasn’t allowed at the men’s table, made quite a scene.

This was her Rosa Parks moment, refusing to follow social convention.

This woman would not remain in the kitchen.

Those who witnessed it were scandalized.

Appalled that she would break that social barrier.

Going where women were not supposed to be.

But they were also appalled because of the anointing itself.

This act wasn’t something just anyone could do.

During those days, the act of anointing was reserved for a prophet or a priest.

Someone deemed special enough to carry out the task.

This woman committed a scandalous act by performing this anointing.

And then there’s the oil itself, which caused a bit of uproar for the disciples.

She used a fine nard.

It was a sacred and extravagant oil.

Worth a year’s wages.

She could have sold it and fed 7,500 people.

It was that valuable.

The disciples were outraged that she would use such an extravagant oil.

That she would waste it on this bizarre moment.

Then, there’s the significance of the oil.

This particular oil was normally saved for the occasion of preparing a body for burial.

This wasn’t your everyday oil.

And so the disciples and others at the table were appalled.

They thought it was an outrageous use of the oil.

That she was wasting this fine oil, using it for the wrong occasion.

Perhaps it was a waste.

The theologian Paul Tillich called the woman’s act a “Holy Waste.

Hers was an example of a holy waste growing out of the abundance of the heart…

an un-calculated surrender.”

The kind of act that is done out of compassion and love.

All because she knew something that the others weren’t yet clued into.

This wise woman knew that Jesus was heading toward his death.

That Good Friday, the darkest day in history, loomed in the coming days.

This wise woman knew.

She knew because she paid attention.

She heard Jesus when he predicted his death.

When he tried to clue them in on what was going to happen.

Being a member of the “other group” gave her a special vantage point.

The Gospel writers often mention two groups of disciples.

There were the Twelve: men who were selected by Jesus and whose legacy is captured by Scripture.

They were Jesus’ closest friends and confidants.

And then there were the Women.

We don’t know how many and we don’t know all of their names.

But they faithfully followed Jesus, welcoming him into their homes.

Helping to fund his ministry.

Providing food for meals and cleaning up afterward.

They were relegated to the thankless, unglorified work of the kitchen.

They were not honored with the title of “Disciple.”

But they still got to hear all that Jesus said.

Perhaps because they weren’t in that inner circle, they could see more clearly what was going on.

From their point of view, the message was a bit clearer.

As the wise woman tagged along with the gang of disciples, she understood what was happening.

From her place on the fringes of Jesus’ entourage, she put the pieces together.

She recognized that he was days away from his death.

And that he deserved a sacred anointing.

Funny how the most unexpected characters in scripture seem to understand the most.

The twelve disciples were supposed to the ones who understood.

And yet throughout their story, they failed to get it.

All the way to the end, when they abandoned Jesus on the cross.

They failed to understand.

But the women understood.

They were the ones who would stay with Jesus all the way to the end.

They were the ones who comforted him at the foot of the cross.

They were the ones who would prepare his body for burial.

A process that was started by this wise woman at the dinner table.

She began to prepare his body for death.

She did so in a way that honored him in a most sacred way.

She used this incredibly expensive oil to douse his head.

Anointing him in a most unorthodox manner.

Much to the shock and dismay of the disciples.

What she did was honor Jesus and give him the blessing he deserved.

This isn’t too different than the work that the Make-a-Wish Foundation does.

It is a non-profit that helps dying children fulfill their dreams.

I recently heard a criticism of the program.

It came from someone who didn’t think it was a good use of resources.

That the money spent on these dying children could be used in a better manner.

Like putting it toward cancer research, or buying medications for those who need it.

Those are certainly important things to invest in.

But there is something to be said for giving an extravagant gift to a dying child.

These young people face a shortened timeline, unable to look forward to a long and healthy life.

And so, the Make a Wish Foundation goes to great lengths to provide an experience that will bring joy to the child’s heart.

It might be a trip to Disney World to meet Mickey.

Or playing catch with a favorite pro-baseball player.

Whatever that child dreams up, the Foundation makes happen.

Sure, critics may have a point about the use of resources, but it’s hard to argue with the smiles that shine on the faces of those children.

Most would agree that the Make-a-Wish is providing a loving service to those kids.

Giving them one last gigantic hurrah before their bodies succumb to illness.

This wise woman from our scripture this morning, is offering a similar service to Jesus.

Despite the detractors who would say that oil would be better used elsewhere, she can think of no better purpose than to anoint the head of Jesus as his time comes to an end.

She is like a hospice nurse, lovingly caring for her dying patient.

Providing that much needed comfort as his dark hours approach.

She is one of many women in scripture who play an important role,

But who’s contribution to the Kingdom often goes unnoticed.

This wise woman isn’t given the honor of her name being written down.

She isn’t given any special distinction or recognition.

But today, as we celebrate the gifts of women, we celebrate this one wise woman.

We celebrate her bold act of anointing Jesus.

Of seeing what others couldn’t see,

Understanding what others couldn’t understand.

Hers was an act of faithfulness and wisdom.

She took a risk to honor her Lord in a right manner.

And while we don’t know her name, her brave act did not go unrecognized.

“I tell you,” Jesus said, “wherever the good news is proclaimed in all the world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

May we remember this wise woman’s actions, celebrating her boldness and courage.

Striving to imitate her faithfulness.

And choosing to love as she loved.

Amen.