

Oh Yes She Did!
John 12:1-8
October 26, 2008
Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church
John R. Richardson

(Note: this sermon begins with the Litany of Illumination)

Litany of Illumination

Leader: Jesus said: Blessed are the comfortable, for God has shown them his favor.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

Leader: Jesus said: Blessed are those who have good pension funds, for God has shown them his favor.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

Leader: Jesus said: The strong and powerful will inherit the earth.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

Leader: Jesus said: Blessed are the winners, for they will inherit everything.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

Leader: Jesus said: Don't do anything to undermine the existing order—to do so is to go against God.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

Leader: Jesus said: Look after yourself; then if you have something left over, give a coin to the poor.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

Leader: Jesus said: God is a nice old man, who doesn't want anyone to rock the boat.

Right Side: *OH NO HE DIDN'T!*

Left Side: *OH YES HE DID!*

(Galloway, Kathy, ed. *The Pattern of Our Days: Worship in the Celtic Tradition from the Iona Community*. New York: Paulist Press, 1996.)

John 12:1-8

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,

5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"

6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.

8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

OH NO SHE DIDN'T!!!...

OH NO SHE DIDN'T!!!

OH NO SHE DID NOT JUST DUMP THAT BIG OL' BOTTLE OF NARD OUT ON JESUS FEET!!!!!!!!!!...

I CAN HEAR IT, CAN YOU? ... I can hear it... can you? Imagine the setting as if we were there... I mean seriously...Imagine what it would have been like if we were there.. at the table...

Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead a few days before, and all of the Jewish elders are getting a little edgy, because all these miracles that are going on are causing people to jump on Jesus' bandwagon... the Jews are losing members... and the Jews ain't like Presbyterians... No sir. When the Jews of the New Testament start losing members they get nervous...when they start losing members somebody's head is going to roll....so the word is out on the street and there's a price on Jesus' head...

So Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead a few days before and what does he decide to do? Go back to Bethany, stop by Lazarus' house and break a little bread... Make sure ol' Lazarus is still kickin...

Martha's back in the kitchen... You remember back in the Gospel of Luke the conversation Martha had about missing out because she was in the kitchen working away... well in the Gospel of John she still hasn't learned...she still hasn't learned... But I bet she finds out what happens ... you better believe she does.. because Mary... Mary's at Jesus' feet, and all of a sudden, without any warning she dumps out a pound of costly perfume onto Jesus feet... and then she lets her hair down to wipe it of!

OH NO SHE DIDN'T!..... Oh no she didn't!...

You see, this is the point of the story where I think we stop... because I'm a stewardship guy... I mean most of the folks that know me know that stewardship is something I'm pretty big on—it's what I do for a living! Early on in my life I learned that most Presbyterians don't like to talk about money, because when you talk about money it begins to make people nervous, and Presbyterians for some reason are inherently nervous, constantly battling to do everything decently and in order... BUT, when you talk about money and about business stuff and call it "stewardship" it tends to make folks a little less nervous... So I'm a stewardship guy... so when I read a pound of Nard... 300 Denarii.... OK, Yeah right, whatever. But when I read the footnote down at the bottom of the page in my bible... when I read that a pound of nard costs 300 denarii, and that's about what a laborer makes in a year... in a year!!!!

Let me put this into perspective for us... last year the median American family brought in about \$42,000 bucks... I can't imagine spending \$42,000 for anything... Incidentally, we need to be reminded that the federal poverty level for the USA is \$21,200 for a family of four, and that minimum wage (\$6.15/hour) employee makes just \$12,700 a year! But back to my point... I can't imagine spending \$42,000 on anything!

You know a couple of years ago there was this study done in the PCUSA... called the Presbyterian Panel Study... Interviewed all these people... and when it came to giving money to the Church... the average family pledged \$800... elders pledged \$1350... pastors...\$1600

And I'm thinking to myself if I'm a good Presbyterian and I've got a church pledge fund... Maybe I should also set up a nard fund... say I put \$1600 a year for the church and \$1600 for my nard... I double what the average pastor pledges... because as a Columbia Seminary Graduate, and a Clemson University Graduate, and as child of the Presbyterian church, I know that y'all raised me to be above average, right? But even at \$1600 a year it's still going to take me almost 30 years to save up \$42,000... 30 years!!!!!!!

So this woman... \$42,000... and she just dumps it out... to honor Jesus... She brings it to the table... She brings it to the Table... a sum of money that could change her life... I mean, whether you're rich or not, \$42,000 is \$42,000... and it did change her life... because not only did she just dump it out. No! Then she lets her hair down and washes Jesus' feet! Did you know that you can still be arrested in some parts of the Middle East if you're a woman and you let you hair down... in 2006... you can't tell me they were more progressive 2000 years ago... So no, her life is definitely going to be different.

At least that's what I'd be thinking if I was there... because I wouldn't have gotten it. I wouldn't have gotten it. Judas definitely didn't get it... and If I were a betting man I'd bet a dollar to donuts that nobody heard a word Jesus said after Mary dumped out that perfume... Like we'd be at a dinner party at Laura and Chuck Conrad's house and someone drops a \$42,000 bottle of perfume and anyone is going to remember what the host says after that!...

But I guess we do remember... because Jesus isn't shocked at all... in fact... I can see Jesus just smiling... no, he's not smiling because he's getting a \$42,000 pedicure... No, he's smiling because he knows that Mary's the only one that gets it... she's the only one that gets it... You see, when she comes to the table she brings everything she's got, and she gives it all up for the glory and honor of Jesus...

Henri Nouwen is a friend of mine... He's a friend of yours too, even if you don't know it, because I have heard my father James T. Richardson quoting Henri Nouwen in church for most of my life. If you don't know him you need to get to know him... he was a Roman Catholic priest who died long before his time a few years ago. No, I never actually had a chance to meet him in person, but he continues to speak to all of us through his writings. A few years ago I was re-introduced to something he wrote back in 1979 in his book Wounded Healer. He wrote that the imitation of Christ does not mean to live your life like Christ, but to live your life as authentically as Christ lived his. Let me repeat that. He wrote that the imitation of Christ does not mean to live your life like Christ, but to live your life as authentically as Christ lived his.

You see, Mary's not trying to be Christ... She's not trying to be Christ..... She's simply trying to be the person Christ has called her to be... She's doing exactly what our Westminster forefathers would tell her to do. You know the Westminster Catechism; it's in our Book of Confessions that makes up part of the Constitution that defines us as Presbyterian Christians. The first question: As human beings, what is our Chief End? To glorify God and enjoy God forever! She's glorifying God and Enjoying God... She's glorifying God and Enjoying God!

And I look at this table this morning, and I think about Mary, and Jesus...No she Didn't!... No she Didn't!

And so I look at this table and I think and I think about Mary... and Jesus...and about myself and I struggle, because I know that I get up every morning and read the paper, and I hear about more bombs in Baghdad or Afghanistan, or more violence in the Middle East, or more atrocities in Darfur... And I think about the homeless man in the parking lot right around the corner from my house,

And I struggle, because in the back of my mind I know that one of my biggest worries isn't whether I'm going to get killed in a roadside bombing, or where I'm going to lay my head tonight, or where my next meal is going to come from... No, I struggle because I know in the back of my mind that one of the biggest issues I have to deal with involves trying to figure out how much money I need to give to the Church... And I know that the truth of the matter is that where I am today, both here in Oakland Avenue Church, and here—in my life—has as much to do with the fact that I was born into the right family at the right place at the right time as much as it has to do with anything... and I can't do a darn thing about it!

Do you ever feel this way?

In our Old Testament lesson this morning we heard another great story, the story of Moses getting to the top of Mt. Nebo, seeing the Promised Land, and then dying "at the Lord's command (v.5)." A few years ago I visited the top of Mt. Nebo, in Jordan, or the supposed top of Mt. Nebo, where Moses looked out over into the Promised Land. I stood in that place, just as Moses might have, and I looked out into the Promised Land, and I continue wondering to this day: "Do you think Moses was happy?" I mean he never made it to the Promised Land, but he did catch a glimpse of it, and then he just died, at the Lord's command. But I continue to wonder, "Do you think he was happy?"

Thank you for letting me worship with you this morning, because you have once again inspired me. Because in the same way that Moses caught a glimpse of the Promised Land, I too am inspired about what our world could look like each and every time I worship in a church of believers. I catch a glimpse of that Promised Land, and you have shared that with me this morning. Worshipping with you here this morning I have once again caught a glimpse of that Promised Land and that inspires me to be a better person, and it makes me happy.

And so once again I look at this table and I think about Mary... and about Jesus... and about myself and I continue to struggle... not about Baghdad or the Middle East... or that homeless man around the corner from my house... No, I struggle because I think about myself coming to this table... and I wonder... I ask myself if I had an extra \$42,000 in my back pocket, if I had an extra \$42,000 and I came to this table... would it even cross my mind? ...would I even begin think about leaving it here? Maybe half... maybe one quarter of it... maybe 1/10th...

And then I think about Mary and I smile through my tears...

Hey, y'all, ... Do y'all remember that story about Mary at the table...dumping out that \$42,000 bottle of perfume... No she didn't ... No she didn't...

Yes she did...

Yes she did...

Yes she did...

Let us pray.