

WELCOME 25 March 2018 Palm Sunday '18 B

John 12:1-15

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay for morning tea after worship so we can get to know one another better...

More than any of our other senses—the sense of smell hits us deepest. One whiff of a certain scent & our hearts are unleashed.

Baby smell (the good or the bad ones) – fresh bread – newly mown grass or freshly sawn wood – rain - a loved one's perfume or cologne. Scientists tells us 75% of all emotions can be triggered by smell.

But not all scents evoke good reactions: the odour of waste or decay, the stench after a bush/house/car fire, the smell of death. We say "something smell's fishy" & we don't mean seafood. Or that someone "caused a stink" & we don't mean it positively. We are told animals can "smell fear."

We begin this Holy Week with the smell of death wafting through the air. Jesus' enemies are certain he must die. But Jesus wants your nostrils to be filled with the aroma of love; a scent so strong & overwhelming, a fragrance so powerful & inviting you are drawn to it & captivated by it.

Only the fragrance of his love will transform every nasty odour in your life & in the world. Only the fragrance of his love can sustain us in the days ahead, for it is filled with promise & hope & indeed helps us make sense of Easter.

We'll experience & explore that together today.

LWKids is ON! Tamaris & Áine will lead our youngest disciples out to the verandah during the next song medley.

If you'd like to be part of that team leading our kids...see me today!

Palm Sunday '18 B – MAKING SENSE OF EASTER: THE SCENT OF EASTER

- FAITH CHAT: 1. What scent evokes the best/happiest memory for you?
2. What smells do you associate with Easter?

Rudyard Kipling wrote, "Smells are surer than sounds or sights To make your heart-strings crack." Without question, most people have experienced a smell that floods them with arresting memories of a person/place/event. The sense of smell, emotions, & memory share closely the networked real estate of our brains. Our sense of smell relates closely to how we experience life & process significant memories.

Not surprising is also the fact that 2 people can experience the same smell & process/experience it completely differently. Leonie is allergic to shellfish. I am not. For her the smell of prawns/crabs...stomach gets a bit dicey. For me...I start thinking about how many I can eat. Certain flowers/scents can cause negative reactions for one person while the other wants to fill their house with those fragrances.

So we should not be too shocked to discover that when Mary breaks the neck off a jar of aromatic oil & anoints Jesus...and the aroma fills the house & overwhelms even the smell of the meal...somebody's going to react negatively. The strongest reaction comes from Judas...the other gospels record complaints from all 12, but it seems Judas fired the first verbal volley & was the most notably upset. The objections all suggest that her gift was wasted...squandered...frittered away...better use.

Now I'm not going to pick on Judas...John tells us all we need to know...but I think you know someone just like Judas (not thief/betrayer) but someone who likely has said to you, "Why would you waste a perfectly good Sunday morning in church?" Why would you give up your only day to sleep in? Why would you force your kids to not do Sunday sport only to go someplace that's got nothing for them? Why waste a perfectly good day to be out in your boat/caravan/family? Your smiles tell me you know Judas...maybe all too well?

Push it further...Why do you waste your time at...Meals on Wheels, RDA, Shelters, Nursing Home, working with new Australians? Why do you serve with Red Frogs? You should be the one having the fun. You could be doing more with your time. Some have certainly asked of us...Why do you give so much \$\$ away as a church? You could better use that for your own needs...In every instance the Judas question is about "self." It's the "What do you get from this?" question. Judas smells waste in the air & he gives off is the smell of self-investment...self-interest...Judas sniffs the wind & smells waste...& he reeks of self-centeredness.

But as the oil pours over Jesus & Jesus catches the first hint of the aroma...he knows that smell...it's love...it's gratitude...it's humility (the death of self). We know Mary is loved by Jesus & believes in him. Her brother sitting right there at that table was dead but she watched Jesus raise him back to life & restore her family to its wholeness. He absorbed their grief & braved the stench of death to bring life & joy & abundant extravagant love. Her outpouring of this elaborate gift is undoubtedly an act of thanksgiving for the gift of life, but John suggests much more is in play. Never forget...Jesus had said to Mary & her serving sister Martha, "*I am the resurrection & the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, & everyone who lives believing in me will never die.*" We are never given any insight into Mary's internal thoughts. We do not know what *SHE* intends by her actions, only what Jesus tells us...And what has he told us?

Once Jesus told a parable about a pearl merchant who discovered the most perfect pearl of all time & to have that one pearl sold everything he owned. He told another about someone passing through a field who discovered in that field a treasure beyond imagination & promptly sold all they had to own that field & the treasure in it. He had said if you love anything more than you love me...you lose me.

Judas smells waste...because he loves money it seems more than Jesus. *To Judas is Jesus not WORTH this gift?* Jesus smells in Mary's act thankfulness, devotion, love returned for love received. Judas reeks of self-centeredness. Mary gives off the fragrance of love & worship. Not too many week's back we saw a rich man turn away from Jesus because he could not give up his costly things to follow & be enveloped in the love that is priceless. The disciples saw his back growing smaller in the distance & reminded Jesus they had given up everything to follow him. (Mk 10) Jesus reassured them that a life spent in selfless devotion to Jesus/Kingdom is not wasted...in fact it multiplies in blessings, begets persecution & reaches its fulfillment in eternal life. You cannot waste your life pursuing that which you cannot lose, which is yours as a gift & will never be taken from you.

Let's go a bit further...*that perfume was worth a year's wages*...according to Judas as he smells waste in the room. A year's wages...300 denarii...\$75,000AUD. It is likely Mary has just spent her dowry in one evening. That would be her gift to a future husband & perhaps seed money for their start in life (a home/farm/business of their own). She has just told the world

her future her security her stability her hopes/dreams all reside in Jesus. Mary's gift exceeds extravagance. Mary also exceeds good taste w/ her hair unfurled & her hands/hair on this unmarried man. She is quite public with her expression of deep love that those watching would hardly ignore or find ordinary. It is no wonder those around the table react to Mary's untamed love. Acts of true grace & loving devotion are often slandered as deviance.

But in defending Mary...Jesus points to the even deeper significance of the aromas filling the house & lives of those who witness this event. *Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."*

Mary does not anoint Jesus as king or Messiah. She anoints a dead man walking. If the beautiful scent with its aroma of deep love/deeper devotion & the ugly crucifixion to come seem a strange blend of smells, then we are onto the good news as John tells it: Jesus is lifted up in suffering so he might attract all to himself...Jesus is lifted up in weakness & brokenness so that his glory would shine from his dying...Jesus is lifted up to die in scorn so that his reign would begin from the cross.

In the same place – in the same moment – in the same act Jesus says you can smell life & death. In the same place – in the same moment – in the same act Jesus says you can smell devotion & deceit. In the same place – in the same moment – in the same act Jesus says you can smell salvation & suffering...because it is in the smell of his suffering & death that our salvation is secured.

The next day we see the promise of Jesus' words begin to unfold. He enters Jerusalem to shouts & songs...and the lingering odour of conspiracy & plotting.

When all the people heard of Jesus' arrival, they flocked to see him & also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them & believed in Jesus. The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches & went down the road to meet him. They shouted,

"Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hail to the King of Israel!"

Jesus found a young donkey & rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said:

"Don't be afraid, people of Jerusalem.

Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey's colt."

In the same place – in the same moment – in the same act Jesus says you can smell life & death. In the same place – in the same moment – in the same act Jesus says you can smell devotion & deceit. In the same place – in the same moment – in the same act Jesus says you can smell salvation & suffering...because it is in the smell of his suffering & death that our salvation is secured. By week's end Jesus will be lifted up in suffering so he might attract all to himself...Jesus will be lifted up in weakness & brokenness so that his glory would shine from his dying...Jesus will be lifted up to die in scorn so that his reign would begin from the cross. Jesus will die so that the smell of his love will fill your life & the stench of death be taken away forever...Only the fragrance of his love will transform every deathly odour in your life & in the world. Only the fragrance of his love can sustain us in life, for it is filled with promise & hope - life & joy forever.

Only the fragrance of his love can make your life smell like his:

2 Cor 2:14ff - But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ's triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. 15 Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. 16 To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume.

Let's pray...that we give off that aroma...love life devotion joy hope peace satisfaction contentment freedom assurance salvation everywhere we are...Gracious Father, you loved the world so much that you sent your Son to pour himself out on the cross and remove the odour of death, cynicism and despair from all people. Fill our homes and our lives with the fragrance of your love, that we may lavishly spread the aroma of your grace wherever we go. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.