
The Writer's Inkhorn

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Continuing Reflections on the Word for Your Personal Growth in Christ

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Alabaster Box...

al·a·bas·ter *noun* \ 'al-a-bas-ter\
a species of marble, distinguished for being light, and a beautiful whitish color, almost translucent; often carved into vases, vials, or ornaments
(Merriam-Webster *online* dictionary, 2012)



was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

I had been reading and mining the depths of the story about Jesus being anointed by Mary some days prior to His death. As I considered the broader context of this story from John's narrative, I noted that he had identified three pivotal events which signal the end of Jesus's public ministry, preparing us for His crucifixion. They are a) the anointing at Bethany (John 12:1-11); b) the triumphal entry (vv. 12-19); and c) the coming of the Greeks and other Gentile believers who were looking to see Jesus (vv. 20-36) (Thomas Nelson Study Helps, 1990).

For most of the remarks which follow, my focus will be on the passages in Luke 7:36-50 and John 12:2-8 because of the additional details found in those accounts that added to the richness of my study and to what I was able to draw from, to share with you.

Passover approaches, and amidst the crescendo of events rising to a feverish pitch, amid the hustle and bustle of preparations for the most significant celebration on the Hebrew calendar, an event occurs that brings a halt to the rush, ever so softly. As I imagine it, the clatter stops; a woman has inserted herself into the presence of Jesus and the disciples. Let's begin with Luke's account in 7:36-39 (KJV):

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which

As I paused to reflect on Luke's words, I recalled CeCe Winan's rendition of a song by the title of this issue, *Alabaster Box*. I listened to it twice before returning to my writing, and I give you the same opportunity, if you are near your computer or electronic device and so desire: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uq8VP9osGr>
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Luke continues:

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that touches him: for she is a sinner.

Note, the initial words in the recording seem to indicate that the songwriter has chosen Luke's version of the story to craft the lyrics to her song:

The room grew still as she made her way to Jesus; She stumbled through the tears that made her blind. She felt such pain; Some spoke in anger; Heard folks whisper, *There's no place here for her kind...*

Do you hear Simon's words behind those of the songwriter? *This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner (what kind) of woman this is that touches him...*

And what **kind** is that, Simon? *Whatever kind*

of woman she is, is it likely that she can touch Jesus and not be touched *by* Him in return? Hardly! In the words of one saintly mother who would periodically visit our church, she would state emphatically, "**If you touch the Man, I declare He'll touch you back!**" Isn't that the point *anyway*? To touch, and in turn, *be* touched, *be* transformed by the Master's loving hand upon our lives – our internal selves – and our circumstances at once?

Of all the accounts I read, Luke's seems to tug at me the most as he puts Simon's thoughts front and center. I invite you to continue on in your reading to verses 40-50 to get the sense of what has been pointed out by the writer, Luke, and by Jesus. Those verses are a continuation of Jesus' commentary about Simon, this woman, and the acts of love she has shown. In His unique way, Jesus uses a parable of two debtors to get to the heart of the matter – *Simon's* heart.

Simon's thoughts about this woman are troubling to me, too, in that they cause me to wonder how often are we guilty of Simon's thoughts – Simon's way of thinking about "the other" – those who are not *our* kind. I very specifically chose the more academic expression "*the other*" rather than the more personal "others" precisely because of the distancing the former term implies for me.

Look at Simon's thoughts, so full of indictment that one wonders if he is actually full of contempt for both Jesus *and* the woman. Pause as you consider each phrase separately:

*This man,
if he were a prophet,
would have known
who and what manner of woman this is
that touches him
for she is a sinner.*

Never mind, Simon, **what** she is doing and **why** she is doing what she is doing, and that is, as CeCe sings, "*pouring out her love for the Master from her box of alabaster.*" Can you not see her for looking at her?

Have you ever noticed how we can allow ourselves to be distracted by things we know or

see, and miss the wonder of what God is doing around us in other big and small ways, in the moment? Yes, even in our churches, rather than being caught up in sharing in someone else's worship and praise of God for what He has done *for* them, we rather distance ourselves *from* them. We can easily get distracted by whether or not they are dressed appropriately for **our kind** of church. We question whether they would fit in with **our kind** of people, or whether they might be better 'suited' for the church down the street. In fact, a while back, I heard a woman give testimony of men who had come through a Christian recovery program, being asked to leave church because they were not dressed appropriately. Leave *church*? Seriously?

The Apostle reminds us in James 2:9-11, that if we have respect to certain persons, we are guilty of sin and of transgressing God's law. For the One Who said, "Do not commit adultery" is the same One Who said, "Do not kill." Even if you do not commit adultery but you kill, you are guilty of sin and are transgressing the law. So, in other words, whatever your sin of choice happens to be, you/we are still transgressors of God's law.

...as Expression of Extravagant Love

John recounted this incident as important to have in the record because Jesus declared it to be so. Although Luke does not, John gives the woman an identity in his account:

*Then **Mary** took a pound of ointment [oil] of spikenard, **very** costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor [fragrance] of the ointment (John 12:3, emphasis mine).*

John further verifies her identity for us in 11:2: (*It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.*)

When Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, the treasurer for the disciples, protested to the wastefulness of Mary's extravagant expression of love for Jesus, Jesus came to her defense: *Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.*

"Mary's fragrant offering" was and is the perfume of her worship and adoration poured out in a type of priestly ministry upon the Son of God (Alabaster-Box.com, 2012). Perhaps somewhere in Mary's past she had come across a sacred scroll bearing King Solomon's words:

While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard [oil] sendeth forth the smell [fragrance] thereof (Song of Solomon 1:2)

And here was *her* chance to show such extravagant love to *her* King. This is the same Mary who sat at Jesus' feet, when her sister, Martha, was busy bustling about with preparing things to be 'just so' for the Master and His disciples as they passed through her village on another occasion:

Martha: Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? *Tell* her to *help* me.

Jesus: Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But the one thing that is most needful, Mary has chosen, and I am *not* going to take that *away* from her. (Luke 10:38-42, restated)
Worshipful Mary, loving much, yearning for more of the Master Himself, was garnering what she could, even then, in the brief moments He would be with them before moving on. Perhaps she knew the words of the psalmist:

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)

What better way to behold the beauty of her Lord and Savior than to literally dwell in His presence! Mary must have known deeply within her soul – must have *understood* – that time was of the essence. Are *you* feeling a sense of urgency in *your* spirit? Is there a stirring in *you*, a longing to draw closer and sit at the Savior's feet so that you may more clearly hear His words for your life? If you are not feeling it, sensing it, then plead

with Him to draw you "*nearer, nearer, precious Lord.*"

Weaver (2000) reminds us that spiritual hunger and thirst are quite the opposite of natural hunger and thirst. Imagine this: the more we feast on the things of God, the hungrier we get! The thirstier we get! We *want* more of Him and we want to *give* Him more of us, more of our worship, more of our substance, feeling that *nothing* that we have is too precious for Him. *This* is extravagant love.

...as Metaphor for Unbridled Worship

The songwriter offers us a speculative look into the heart and mind of Mary, and seems to at once superimpose it onto her *own* life's story as well. CeCe continues in her song:

Chorus:

And *I've* come to pour my praise on Him like oil from Mary's alabaster box. Don't be angry if I wash His feet with my tears and dry them with my hair. *You* weren't *there* the night He found me; *you* did not *feel* what *I* felt when He wrapped His loving arms around me. *You* don't know the *cost* of the oil in my alabaster box.

Jesus took time to point out to Simon that all of the customary things that one would expect a host to extend to his guest in his day and time, Simon had withheld from Him. But *this* woman, whose sins [for which she had been forgiven] were many, *loved much*, and was thus *showing* her love.

I personally know someone who is so intensely enthusiastic, ecstatic *and* excited (yes, to *that* degree) about his relationship with Christ that it can seem to be grating on others at times. Yet, the truth of the matter is, we do not know the *cost* of his praise; we do not *know* the cost of his oil. *Many* of us do not *know* what it is like to come to Christ with only *a* pair of underwear, *a* pair of socks, and a couple of nickels in our pocket, if *that* much. But, rather than *rejoice* with such an one that rejoices because of where God has brought him *from*, and where God has brought him *to*, we may be guilty of saying, "It really doesn't *take* all of that." Really? Then what *does* it take? When is

the last time *you* gave God the very best of *whatever* you were offering?

Do you remember King David dancing before the Lord *with all of his might*, as he carried the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-Edom back to Jerusalem? Do you recall the reaction of a wife who did not understand *his* praise?

And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.
(II Samuel 6:16)

Perhaps Michal thought it was shameful for a king to be expressing [or possibly, exposing] himself like that. Or, perhaps she, too, was guilty of thinking, "It really doesn't *take* all of that." It doesn't? Then what *does* it take? When is the last time *you* praised God with utter abandon?

There is a lesson in these stories that warns us to be careful of whom and what we despise, especially when the offering is to *God* and not for us. Though some of us may see on the surface, how low someone has sunken into despair, only God truly knows the *internal* depths of their degradation and what it took for **Him** to deliver *them* from Satan's grip. *Our* directive is to simply *rejoice with them that do rejoice!* (Romans 12:15).

...as Memorial to Mary

Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. (John 12:7)

Verily I say unto you, Wherever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. (Matthew 26:13)

Verily I say unto you, Wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. (Mark 14:9)

We hardly give sufficient thought to these questions: For *what* will **I** be remembered? To what have I given *my* heart and soul, and is that the thing for which I *want* to be remembered? Pause and think about it. Here is the crux of the matter: *that thing* that people will most remember is not necessarily that for which we want most to be remembered; it may be the other way around, in spite of our best intentions. Our *actions* are as much *artifacts* of that which has been the focus of our hearts as are the things we leave behind.

So, if what we are giving our heart and soul to is in no way connected to the One who gave His very best – His only Son – to us, then there is some reprioritizing we need to do, and it is important that we attend to it in the immediate.

I remember distinctly, as a young child, my mother taught me a poem to say in church. The words are simple enough for even a child to understand, yet they express what is truly at the heart of the matter – *our* hearts:

What can I *give* Him as poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would give Him a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. What can I *give* Him? I'll give Him my heart.

There is nothing God wants more than our whole heart, as evidenced by us giving *the best* of our service and ourselves to Him. He is *most* deserving of our extravagant love and our unbridled worship.

Your Teacher and Sister,
Dr. Mary Webster Moore

Sources:

The Holy Bible, King James Version

Sjostrand, J. (1997). *Alabaster Box* [Recorded by CeCe Winans].

Weaver, J. (2000). *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook.

Note: Sister Dr. Janice Sjostrand's composition, "Alabaster Box," was recorded by CeCe Winans and won the 2001 Dove Award for contemporary music.

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