

A Fragrant Life

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon explores the profound love expressed through the actions of Mary and the importance of a heart transformed by God's grace in our relationships and lives.

Duration: 1:17:14

Scripture: Proverbs 13:20, Matthew 6:33, Mark 14:3-6, 2 Corinthians 2:14

Topics: "Living Worthy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a heart that has been visited and filled by Jesus. He uses the story of Baron von Sincendorf and his friends discussing their passions to illustrate the idea of having a deep love for the Lord. The speaker also talks about how people with similar lifestyles and beliefs are drawn to each other, using examples of drunkards and immoral individuals. He then compares Jesus' questioning of Peter to the American use of bunker buster bombs, highlighting the penetrating power of Jesus' love and the need for our hearts to be pierced by Him.

Transcript

It's the engagement of Herbert, who is from South America, and Minky from here. Here are the two getting engaged today. Now, for you who don't know, engagement is not the same as marriage.

They are two completely different things. And as you see them standing here, there's a girl, a man, and they are separate. So, too, engagement and marriage is separate.

So this is an engagement. I stand between them, there's still this apartheid, there's still this discrimination. But, on their wedding, I will not stand between them.

Satan mixes things up. They can't be close enough together. When people are still wooing each other or getting engaged, if they could, they would be sitting on each other.

But, when they get married, that same couple who couldn't get close enough to each other are like cat and dog. That's the devil, Diabolus, who mixes things up. So we are saying, let it be as the Lord has said, engagement is an engagement.

But with marriage, there is that unity. Let everything be in its right order, in its right way, not in stupidity and in madness. They are still separate.

They are not in contact. When they're married, they are made into one flesh. Let me explain that.

People in the world, a person who, in the world, you find them meeting around dark corners and they get married with... One can't interpret that. But you understand it, don't you? This ring now testifies the fact that he feels it's God's will and she feels it's God's will that they should get married. Nobody has chosen it for them.

That's their endowment, their affair. They pray and ask God. We are just happy about it.

Let us pray. Lord, here are your children who feel that they are being led in this way. And we pray that this engagement would hallow your name.

Till the day of their marriage, if you have not yet returned, let this be a time of sanctifying your name. That all who observe may see your holiness, whether they are Indians or blacks or coloreds or whites or whatever type they might be. Amen.

Now, our text, as we are drawing closer to the Easter time, we find in the Gospel according to Mark. We find it in chapter 14. Let's start from verse three.

And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard, and she broke the flask and poured it on his head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves and said, Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor, and they criticized her shockly. But Jesus said, Let her alone.

Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish, you may do them good. But me, you do not have always.

She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint my body for burial. Assuredly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is preached throughout the whole world, what this woman did will also be spoken of her as a memorial to her.

We'll read thus far. At this very time where they were meeting together in this home, there was a plot to destroy him by the high priests in them. It was difficult, enemies from without wanting to attack him and kill him.

But at that very time, Satan was coming from within. Attacks from without are nothing in comparison to the danger of attacks from within. It is there that you need grace.

And that is why Christians need to be ever so careful and on their guard, for if Satan cannot get it right to attack from without, he will do something within. For those within are of more danger than those without. And we can narrow that circle even more and say that the real enemy isn't even those within.

It is you yourself. Your greatest enemy finally is yourself. Your heart.

And if Satan comes up in your heart and he gets hold of you there, well then you just drift with the river and are eaten by the sharks. Beware then, there is no enemy without or even within, except yourself who is the real danger. It is you yourself who can cast yourself into hell through your bad decisions.

The Lord said that through your own words you can be condemned or through your own words you can be justified. If you give free reign to sin, to evil thoughts, to evil deeds, well you are killing yourself. Now they were in the house of a man who had leprosy in the town of Bethany.

Now Bethany was a neighbouring village of Jerusalem just to the east of it. And they were very close to the time when Jesus was to be crucified. Simon the leper invited him and sat him down at the table.

Then it is recorded that a woman arrived there in the scene. John records this woman as being Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Now as the food was on the table this woman came in.

She came in with this alabaster flask of the most wonderful scent or oil of spikenard. Today we would say perfume. She went to the Lord and breaking the flask she poured it over the Lord's head even down to the feet.

The whole house was filled with the wonderful sweet fragrance. Then it says, but some of the disciples then were very upset and angry. John records that it was Judas Iscariot.

Then it says, but some of the disciples then were very upset and angry. But here in Mark it is recorded that there were others who were indignant. In other words they together with Judas, Judas being the ringleader.

Now you listen to this carefully Christians. They were siding with the opinion of one who had a wicked heart. One whose heart was in the money.

He was a thief. Here we discover that even the disciple of Jesus can be swept away and be influenced. But a thief, a thief, Judas Iscariot, he was the one who had a wicked heart.

He was the one who had a great light. He was the one who had a great light. And the leader of this being Judas Iscariot, do you hear the sensitivity of this? Do you hear what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Judas Iscariot was indignant.

He said to Judas Iscariot, A whole year's salary, even more could have been spent on this. It says 300 denarii, which was a year's salary. But you don't just use every single cent to buy something like this, a jar of perfume.

But instead you would use as much as you can. This could have been such a huge amount, perhaps two years of salary. Just imagine, if you make profit, it's just a small percentage of your earnings.

So if it was a year's salary, how many years would you have sweated to buy such oil, such perfume? Perhaps this was of the most expensive oil or perfume in the world. Judas was so angry and the others with him sharply criticized her until the Lord Jesus said, Leave her alone. What she has done is a good thing.

The poor you always have with you, but with me, I'm not always going to be here. But this woman had grasped hold of a mystery for opportunities passed by. Some opportunities come by once, and should you not grab the opportunity, you've missed it forever.

It was her final chance to anoint the Lord for His death. Take note that opportunities do come and go. If the Lord convicts you of something, make that right immediately.

Don't delay it. You might never get that chance again. And these men were very upset and they raised their different issues and their different points as to why this could have been used in a better way.

They said some could have been helped and the poor fed through this money. They criticized, condemned, their leader being Judas, who had the purse. Think of the financial side, how he loved it.

Some were in agreement until the Lord Jesus Himself spoke and defended this woman. And said what she has done is a good thing and throughout the whole world, this good thing she's done for me will be spoken of. Not that it's wrong to help the poor, that's good.

But in this position, in this particular moment, it wasn't the right thing to do. That this woman, Mary, should take this whole bottle, not just a little bit of it, but the whole thing and break the flask, what caused her to do it? She didn't say to herself, well, this is so expensive after all, let me use an appropriate amount and see one day later on if I can use some more for you. What did it do for him? What had caused this happening? You see, the matter of faith is a matter of the heart.

It is a matter of the heart and if the heart hasn't been dealt with and has been got hold of by the Lord, then it's all in vain. Now this Mary came in with this flask of oil, not wondering, not being afraid and concerned, but knowing that it would touch everyone in the home. She didn't have questions like, what will these men think of me? Mary is free.

She just does what is on her heart and does it fearlessly, not regarding the men's opinion. No one had tried to stop her. No one had tried to set her up or to influence her or to even suggest it.

This came from the Holy Spirit speaking in her heart and it was, Jesus deemed it to be a good thing and the whole house was filled with the sweet fragrance. This was pure undiluted oil and that's what she expressed herself with. She expressed herself with that she withheld nothing, she poured it all on the Lord Jesus.

What has caused it? The heart. Jesus was great to her. Jesus was greater to her than this treasured oil.

Jesus was so much greater, that's why she just felt, I have to pour it upon him in this manner. But amazingly, the matter doesn't start with the oil or the perfume. Yes, it does express her great love for the Lord Jesus and the love that she has for God.

But how great it was. But it starts at a distance, not right there at that moment. The Bible says, we love him for he first loved us.

That Mary should do this great act, this wonderful thing for her Lord was because the Lord had done something for her a long time before. And this expression, this act of hers was because of the overflowing love from her heart. The Bible says, he who is forgiven much, loves much.

Remember that immoral woman who had been misbehaving in the world and she came, sat at the feet of Jesus? Simon had come and said, well, if the Lord was truly a prophet, he would have recognized and discerned where this woman came from. And Jesus, seeing his thoughts, said, Simeon, when I came you didn't even wash my feet. But she, since I've come, has not stopped washing my feet with her tears and her hair.

The Lord said, why? Because she has much more love. Her sins are forgiven. That's why she loves much.

There must have been the day where Mary saw her sinfulness and realized that she was a lost sinner belonging to hell. She had cried to the Lord, received the Lord's forgiveness. And then, not knowing how she could express her appreciation, she came with this expensive jar and just broke it upon the Lord.

She came to the Lord Jesus for he had come to her. Listen to that. The Lord Jesus had come to her, worked in her heart and had done great things for her.

You can't come to Jesus and do something for him before he has done something for you. You can't come to Jesus and do something for him before he has done something for you. I remember once a very unhappy preacher testifying of how he felt that what he had done was in vain and not effective.

He wanted to do something for Jesus. He went then to a certain renowned African preacher asking for help. He said, show me what must I do? I want to serve the Lord.

He was a German missionary, an old grey haired German missionary and he went to the old doormen. He says, there's nothing more in this world that I would like than to serve Jesus, to bring forth much fruit, but I don't see it. The old man said, that's your mistake.

You want to serve him. You can't serve him before he has served you. You can't do something for Jesus before he has done something to you in your heart.

And Mary came and served the Lord, having experienced Jesus filling her heart, changing her heart and having done something there. She came to Jesus because Jesus had come before her and had filled her heart. She came to the Lord Jesus because he had come to her and had filled her heart to overflowing.

The Bible says we love him because he first loved us and has shed abroad his love in our hearts. The Lord had poured out his love in her heart and has filled it. Do you have an idea of that? Do you know what that means when your heart is filled with the love of God? Have you experienced that? That your sins being removed, he comes and he pours into your heart his love.

Do you have an idea of what that means? Do you know what that means when your heart is overflowing with the love of God? Have you any inkling of what that means? A heart absolutely overcome with and conquered by the love of God? Mary knew. Finally the whole home was filled with the sweet fragrance. I'm often at loss as to describe and to depict and to expound this to make this to be absolutely clear to you and often ask well Lord what are their hearts made of? What are in their brains? Mary coming to pour this oil on the Lord had experienced a long time before the Lord pouring his love into her heart.

Jesus had a long time before that come to her and filled her heart and this love burned in her heart. Remember the two disciples on the road to Emmaus where they were depressed and not knowing what had happened to the Lord and after the Lord had spoken to them they testified to each other. Did you feel that heat, the warmth of the Lord as he spoke? They felt the fire.

Do you feel this fire? You at school, you girl, you boy, do you feel this fire? And you older people and you parents, do you feel this fire? The Lord asked Peter, do you love me? Asked them the second time and the third time, going deep. Saddam Hussein has had his bunkers in which he has been hiding built originally by Germans and told by those builders that even if an atom bomb had to go off your bunker is safe, you will not be injured down there. But the Americans have been using bunker buster bombs where the first one penetrates into the concrete, the second one goes into that very same hole and the third one does the blasting and the damage right down there.

And our hearts can have that thickness of concrete but Jesus sends his bomb to penetrate and to Peter he sent his first, his second and his third till it struck home. And I have been made to understand that our SABC, the Christian Association, the government media has been, it has removed CNN and has replaced it with an Arabic network and they want to hear from the Islamic point of view. You find all these complaints, Bush, he's got no brains and Bush, he's only fighting for Christianity.

And Muslims have scored a victory in this, get your shoes off already, put on your white clothing. Now that I've got to this is because of what the Lord Jesus asked Peter thrice, that penetrative bomb like the Americans, which goes, penetrates right through. To believe is a matter of the heart, the heart that has been visited by Jesus and worked on by the Lord and filled by him.

My question which I've been asking in German is, do you have any inkling, any idea of the Lord doing that and filling your heart? One day, Baron von Zinzendorf was sitting with his friends, I call them his friends and they happen to be his age. And they were chatting and they were discussing among themselves what it is that drives them, what is their particular passion. The passion, the thing that you love more than anything else.

One answered, what I love more than anything else is to hunt. He said to hunt for a deer or for a buck, there's nothing that surpasses it. The second one said, well my passion is for gambling, to throw the dice, to gamble is what drives me.

The third said, none of these things interest me. Women, that's my passion, beautiful women, you cannot surpass that. And Zinzendorf who was a count.

Zinzendorf, these men said but Zinzendorf why do you keep quiet, tell us what is your driving passion. And he answered, my driving passion, what consumes my heart is Jesus, it is Jesus, him alone. It is as if though I could stand you up now and ask you individually, who identifies with this of Zinzendorf? Who experiences this passion, this which Zinzendorf was speaking of, anything else is but an empty shell.

You Minky and you Herbert as well, this is to be your driving passion, this is to be the most important thing to you. For some it's not like that, some are inspired by filth, like some said gambling or pretty women, prostitution. Their lusts, that's what they feel, that's what they experience, that's what drives them.

But Mary is not there, she is saying great is this one, he who has done so much for me. Remember on another occasion Jesus was in their home, where was Mary to be found? At Jesus' feet, listening to his words. Some people are driven by excuses not to be in the service.

Well you cooked last Sunday, let me do it. And any excuse to try and not be at the service, or looking at the watch every now and then, gazing at the watch, when will the service end? God to Mary, Jesus was the greatest to Mary, she grasped hold of his words and grabbed them and clung to them. Like Mary the mother of Jesus, it says of her that she stored up in her heart the words of the Lord, so too with this Mary who sat at his feet not wanting to miss a word.

When did you last hear Jesus speaking to you? Is Jesus precious to you and his word, wanting to be driven by him, wanting to be led by him? Now we met with a thing here, it's a long time ago. I mentioned to Catherine that there seems to be something wrong with that person. Catherine wanted to try and keep him because he worked well for her.

Johann Becker was and is very patient. And if we need to ask a person to leave, he will ask for patience that the person gets another chance. A counsellor who has time for sinners.

But these days he was caught red handed, this particular person. Then he came to me, came to me, I was there in my bedroom, on my bed. He said, Uncle Elo, I'm troubled by a nervous condition.

I'd been in Zimbabwe and was badly treated there and now here I am being badly treated here too. He was trembling, asking for forgiveness. He said, even though as a man I shouldn't be crying.

He told this story, in my heart I felt sympathy. I saw him as being a troubled person. Only two things that were a red light to me of warning.

Full of criticism towards people here at Gwasabantu, but not one thing criticising himself. And I thought, well is it possible to live with people and only find things wrong with them and never find anything, not a single thing wrong with yourself. That's what it's like with people who leave and who find so much fault but they never find fault with themselves.

Only one, that was one red light. I'm helping you as well. Those people that talk about other people's sins and criticise them, but they don't criticise themselves.

That's what it's like. Secondly, Secondly, In his box, Daka was found. Who must have planted this? In fact, I have an idea.

It might have been that person or that person. It's amazing to hear such an excuse like the common excuse if something is found. And here in Africa, you'll find that even for persons found with an avocado peel, this actually happened.

In his pocket, he said, Oh, I don't know. Who must have put it there? He said, Uncle Elo, I don't know you. He said, Uncle Elo, I don't know you.

I phoned to ask if there'd be somebody available at the reception to take him then back to Durban, to the Ock specifically. It is a rehab centre, a place of refuge for people in the area quite close to the bay, to the harbour, and they allowed to smoke there. He said, Uncle Elo, I don't know you.

I checked it out with others, first with Katrin, with Yohan, and they also agreed that he just had to go, and that even those who sleep with him in the room would be really upset if he was allowed to continue in that state. I was in prayer saying, Lord, I don't want to be guilty of sending away this person. I then called him and I said, well, since there is no peace between us and those that are with you, they say this and you only complain about them, I think it's better that we part, and we're going to arrange for you to be taken down there to the ark, and he asked when, and I said immediately, and I'd also arrange some money because he had been working.

I sent him then to Katrin to go and get some money. He said, Uncle Elo, don't get ideas that she has it all. She doesn't have it with her.

She has to only fetch it from the bank. Lest they go and rob her, give her a stick over the head. She's got no money.

If she needs money, she goes to the bank. All right. Then we found Brother Thomas.

Now we have Thomas. I got Thomas and arranged with him that he take him, although he preferred to rather go to the Salvation Army than to the ark. I said, fine.

Last night I got a phone call. Who was it? Thomas. I'm in Stanga, he said.

I thought, well, maybe they've had an accident or something. What's happened, Thomas? Well, we've gone into a roadblock, Uncle Elo. The police then told us to open our boot.

The boot or the trunk of the car. And there they found four packets of marijuana. I don't know whether they'd use the money to go and buy it all.

I'm appointed. The police asked him. The police asked him, where did you get this from? He said, I don't know.

It must have been planted. And I said, well, you climb into the police van at the back. He said, well, Thomas, I don't know where you got it from.

The police asked him, where did you get it from? He said, I don't know. He said, well, Thomas, I don't know where you got it from. He asked me what he should do because he's now ready on his way to going behind bars and whether he should bail him out.

I said, forget about bail. You just come home. If you're not helped by my sermons, maybe you'll be helped by the sermon of jail.

You see what was full in his heart? I don't want to go into even any details of the other concoctions that they were involved in, lest someone tries to experiment. But you experiment and you'll find yourself landing in jail. That can be a person who's in the service every Sunday and during the week as well.

Though you're in the service, your heart not yet dealt with. So there are things that can be in the heart. What is in yours? Before you worship Jesus, let him come and serve you.

Let him deal with you. And then Mary could not leave the Lord alone, for he was the greatest one to her. And every action of hers was now out of love and thankfulness and appreciation.

What was her hidden motive? What was she aiming at ultimately? She didn't have any ulterior motives. She was simply expressing her love and thanking him. Do you love me? Take care of my lambs.

Do you love me? Take care of my sheep. Out of love. Do you love me? Take care of my sheep.

Out of love. Some people have the attitude of, I don't know why I'm mistreated like this and why others don't handle me better. I put so much work into it, but there was nothing, not a trace of this in Mary.

She was just full of thanks, full of gratefulness. And you see, this is the heart of faith. There are some men who are, some women who are true men and have manliness and heroism about them.

We can't get away from it. Even if you get bad women, you get some that are very, very, very good. Mary signed the book.

In other words, she put a seal on it. But those who are angry, Judas is scared of them. We read of them till today.

How mustn't they bow their heads in shame and anguish at their deed? Well, the Mary's in our midst. Where are the Mary's? We need them. Let us stand to our feet.

We thank you Lord for the story. Where you show us a woman who has been noble, pure, clean, the highest quality. Lord, may she be a good example and we not be counted in the group of Judas Iscariot.

Where you said, Lord, leave her alone for what she's done. Her deed is good to me. Lord, may our lives be in this way.

With that person in the car, the police, when they stopped him, they looked at him and his passenger and they said, open the boot. We want his luggage. They, and he asked them later on, what is it? They said, we see in his eyes.

Let the evidence of the fragrance of Christ be in us. We're at a service these days down there. And I mentioned to him, we're at a service these days down there.

And I mentioned to him, we're at a service these days down there. And I mentioned to him, we're at a service these days down there. And so you'll find, as we mentioned in the service, that birds of a feather flock together.

A drunk person will be here, one is troubled by alcohol, in no time he's found somebody of similar kind. Or an immoral boy, he'll find a girl in no time. What do they see in each other? How do they get drawn to each other? You get a love letter written to you.

What is it? It's promiscuity seeks out other promiscuity. I heard of young men speaking among each other and the one was nudging the other saying, go and flirt with that girl. And he said, that one never, she'll never allow me.

Let us close then in prayer. We ask you Lord, that by your Holy Spirit you'd continue speaking to us through your Holy Word. That by your grace, your words would not just be eaten up by the birds of the air, by the devil, but that it would rather work in us and change us.

Amen.

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