

Weekly Devotion July 20, 2020
Pastor Matt Woods, Grace Lutheran Church,

“The Scent of the Saved—Do You Pass the Smell Test?”

On a visit to the hospital recently I was reminded that wearing a mask may stop my spit from getting out but it didn't stop the smell of my surroundings from getting in. How important is it to smell good? It's amazing to me how much we do our best not to smell like a human being. The odors that are actually human are not exactly pleasant. I could always tell when the boys had taken their shoes off their feet when we road in the car. It was amazing how sweating feet could engulf the car with so much potency. And BO? Being next to me after I've been working outside is not that pleasant. I once picked up a homeless person to take him across town. Let's just say there was an unmistakable musk that lingered for a week—something of burnt coffee and BO. And let's face it the smells that come from the attic and the especially the basement of our bodies aren't exactly a bed of roses.

Ever consider this? We spend a lot of time trying not to smell like a human being. All one has to do is walk through a store and we are quickly reminded that smelling like a human being is not very welcome. Stores are filled with vast amounts of deodorants, body sprays, perfumes, scented shampoos, body washes, conditioners, hair products, by the hundreds of choices they all communicate that you stink without those things. I always get a kick out of my wife when we are picking out shampoos and such. The first thing she does is pop the top and take a sniff. I don't blame her. If I'm going to where a smell it better be one, I like. It's not just our bodies but it is also where our humanity may linger. We use our scented laundered clothes, our fabric softener sheets, our Febreze homes; our fresh towels, our scented scented kitchens, our baking soda carpets, all to keep the smell of our humanity to a minimum.

It's not just our bodies that smell but our souls also have a scent. Consider our Bible passage from Mark 14:3-9. ³ While he (Jesus) was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

John 12 tells us who this woman was; Mary, Lazarus' sister who only days before witnessed the raising of her brother after being dead four days in the tomb. I wish I wrote down the reference but I recently learned that Mary's gesture was more than adoration but a total expression of her commitment to Jesus. Mary's gift was equivalent to a whole year's salary, apparently some scholars believe this was likely Mary's dowry. Her hope for marriage ... her hope for a future. She put her future into the hands of Jesus. Mary gave Jesus the most precious and valuable thing she owned, with no hope of any return in this life. The smell that wafted over Jesus must have filled the room and would certainly lingered with Jesus perhaps all the way to the cross. In a very real sense, the perfume that came out of that container was very

representative of the smell of the divine working within Mary. The smell of faith was much more potent than her sacrifice. If heaven has scent Mary certainly passes the smell test.

Smells evoke connection. My Nana used to wear Nina Ricci Perfume. She's been gone for many years but if I catch that scent my mind immediately remembers Nana.

It is well-known that when you walk down Disney World's Main Street and smell freshly baked cookies or catch the scent of seawater by Pirates of the Caribbean, it's not your imagination. Disney has "Smellitizers" all around to enhance the guest experience. It's not just limited to the parks, either. Scents are used in hotel lobbies to make one feel at home.

The smell of the divine is also meant to evoke a longing for home; a longing for Jesus, a connection. Offerings in the Old Testament were routinely connected to Sacrifices for the sins of the people and often described as "a pleasing aroma to the Lord" (Numbers 15:3). Eventually, the people stopped caring and only went through the motions with their sacrifices and forgot that repentance was what made the sacrifice pleasing to God. It got to a point that God was more offended by the burnt offering than glad for them. Isaiah 1:11-13 speaks to Israelites of this. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams. . . . Bring no more vain offerings; *incense is an abomination to me*". Their offering simply didn't pass the smell test. The people were not really connecting to the Lord. Instead of smelling like divine repentance the Israelites remained smelling like fallen humanity, and death.

With Jesus that's all different. Ephesians 5:1-2 expresses it this way. ¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Jesus' sacrifice was a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God for our sins. In Jesus we no longer smell like sin, which saturates us down into our DNA, but like the divine. What Mary did lingers to this day. Jesus said she will be remembered. He remembers her. He will not forget us.

The divine aroma permeates our souls. And it has an effect on what is going on around us. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Paul charges Christians to spread "the fragrance of the knowledge of [Jesus Christ] everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life." What we do gives off a scent of the divine whenever we act in repentance, when we forgive, when our prayers rise to God as incense (Psalm 141:2), when we love, when we use gracious speech, when we don't compromise the truth, when we act sacrificially, whenever we remain faithful to Jesus. For the godly it is a welcome reminder and connection to heaven but to the unbeliever it is an offensive odor—noted by Judas reaction to the waste of the expensive perfume.

The smell of the Saved is distinct from this world. And that's good news. The smell of the divine is the absence of death and sin. Imagine a place incapable of smelling bad.

And that's another thought. Ever wonder what heaven smells like? We hear a lot about singing. We hear about what is seen in Revelation. But nothing that I can remember talks about the smell of heaven which is interesting considering the Old Testament Temple was a place with incense, and burning of animals. But what does that matter really? In heaven the important part is that Jesus remembers us as He did Mary. In Jesus believers carry the scent of the Divine whatever that may be—Tell you when I get there.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace. In Jesus. Amen

Pastor Matt Woods-John 3:30