

Pastor Troy E. Medlin  
Grace Lutheran Church, RF  
5th Sunday in Lent, 2022

Evocative Memory, Extravagant Love

Beloved in Christ, I offer you these words in the name of the one true and living God, the one in whose love is poured out into us and is our life even in death. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Just the thought of it, not to mention the aroma and it is like I'm back there again. The scent was a strange combination of things if you are not a runner. Salt, sweat, anointment for sore muscles and also the unmistakable fragrance of crisp, fresh air far from the city.

At mile 18 of 26 when I felt like I was at the end of my rope and went as far as I could, feeling vulnerable, my dad came running up from behind me. And with the tender-knowing touch of a dad to a son, he began to take care of me so I could keep going. Anointing my legs with something that would give them some relief. Giving me what I needed but could not do for myself. That fragrance will now evoke an image not just of running, but of profound love.

They are all around the table with him. I wonder if the faint scent was still lingering in the air like an unwelcome guest. Only days had passed since Lazerus, one who they had loved so deeply, had died. He was wrapped in grave clothes and placed in a cave-like tomb where his body laid for days. Jesus had told them to take away the stone that sat in front of that tomb. There would be a stretch of death. Yet, he persisted. Looking death in the face he spoke and Lazerus walked out. The community was entrusted with the unbinding, he is now sharing a meal with them. Once a dead man he is alive and in their midst again.

Yet the all too familiar scent of death is so strong I wonder if its presence was still hanging around on the periphery. It must have been fresh in the memory of those who were there.

We know about the fragrance and presence of death in our lives, in our bodies, at our tables, in the world. It's scent. How it just hangs around. We are never too far from it.

That scent was enveloped by another that would have been recognizable for those dinner guests. Pure Nard, a perfume that would have cost about a year's worth of wages, was now wafting through the air. Not just a spritz, a lot of it. The scent was powerful. Almost too much. Faithful and devoted Mary with a pound of it anoints Jesus's feet. Then dries his feet with her hair. An overflowing and astounding act of extravagant love. The fragrance poured over him that night meant to prepare him for the day of his burial, not long from now. Maybe the scent itself evoked

memories of burial and death. It's nearness. From then on, it would evoke so much for them. Bring them right back to that moment.

In just one chapter, and a few days, Jesus will be the one doing the anointing. He will be the one washing and drying feet of beloved ones and even the one who would betray him. The very next day, led by love to a cross, he will be poured out for you and me. The gospel of John says blood and water flowed from his side. Emptied completely of life itself he will be placed in a cave like tomb. Three days later the stench of death will be interrupted for good by his own resurrection.

The fragrance of life is now loose in the world. He has done for us something we could never do for ourselves. Through his death and resurrection he has poured his love out lavishly upon us.

In baptism our bodies are washed by him. Forgiven completely. We are anointed with more than we deserve or earn. More than what seems responsible to give flat out to sinners. The very Holy Spirit of God, all of the gifts of that Holy Spirit, and life that goes beyond our many tombs. God's gifts run over us spilling all over.

Yet, even gathering with the Risen Jesus it is still Lent for us. The fragrance of death still seems so powerful and all consuming. Still sticking around. It can leave us disoriented and lost. Whether it is the death of a relationship, the death of a loved one, death in Ukraine and in our streets. Then there are the other deaths that come to us every day. Big and small and take a toll on us.

The people of God find themselves lost in exile. A long way from home. Far away from the promised land. In a place where I'm sure, the presence of death seemed near, its fragrance haunting. In that barren and dry place we hear words of promise. Yes, God is the one who brought us out of the land of Egypt and delivered us from the hands of the Egyptians. Our God is the one who brings freedom from captivity. Now, God is about to do a new thing, here. A way in the wilderness. Water will soon flow in the desert. The God who made that promise is the same one who is here making promises to you wherever you find yourself.

God has come to prepare a new way for you, in your wilderness. And, God's grace waters your desert.

We are now at table with Jesus, Lazarus, and all those who have died and are alive in Christ. Here we receive sustenance, nourishment, and God's Presence. Christ's own life poured out into little glasses and given to you as a gift. Having been to this table and tasted its promises we move back in the wilderness differently. We know it does not last and we are assured our guide is trustworthy. He's walked it all ahead of us. Living in God's future, now, new pathways might appear. We know our destination. The journey is transformed.

Our deserts are less parched too, refreshed by the healing power of the gift of life we keep going. We find water springs up like in the negeb for us. It's relief tastes like an unexpected moment of rest, or surprising companionship, a shared tear, or a longed for laugh. Or that moment when grace seems to wash over us just when we need it. Doing something for us we could never do for ourselves. When you are unexpectedly anointed and loved. Who has God used to show you a new road or to water your desert?

Then there is this fragrance. Maybe it evokes a memory of Jesus or Mary. It is what we bring with us. This fragrance tells us that whatever hints of death we sense are only there because death itself has been put on notice.

The fragrance you give off as you pour yourself out in love. In faithful devotion as your love gushes forth over your neighbors. Like a flood dredging this whole weary world in sacrificial love and mercy. I know that aroma is here. In you, baptized children of God. Just the thought of it and I know the Lord has done great things for us. Even if we are sowing in tears right now, we will reap in shouts of joy.