

# **BREAKING THE ALABASTER JAR**

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St. Aidan's Episcopal Church

Virginia Beach VA 23452

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Luke 7:36-8:3

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We have all heard this story over the years of the woman coming and anointing Jesus' feet from the alabaster jar but have you thought about it at your own home? Imagine you were having a dinner party or maybe even when we have our progressive dinners, we may have invited a special guest of honor eat with us. Everything is going great, the conversations are flowing and everyone is just taking in every word of the guest and then there is a knock at the door and standing there is a woman, she's standing there crying and insisting on seeing our special guest.

We all start looking at each other because we start realizing that we think this is the woman who stands on street corners with a homeless sign. She barges past us and kneels in front of our guest, we all stand their shocked, who does she think she is, this so embarrassing, what is our guest going to think?

This is close to what happened in our Gospel reading this morning. Simon, a Pharisee and respected religious leader, invites Jesus as his guest for the evening. They have all gathered around the table but they do not sit at the table the way we do they actually recline; they lay on their sides as they eat with their feet facing out behind them.

As the dinner guests at Simon's house are reclining around the table getting ready to eat there are people outside the house and maybe around the courtyard hoping to hear what the guests are discussing with Jesus. These are probably some of the people that have been following Jesus around and among them was a woman. In our reading it does not name her but we are told she was a sinner and she brings with her an alabaster jar.

Everyone is shocked; they are staring at her just like we were staring at the homeless woman that came into the house we were at. She comes up behind Jesus and is crying, she is crying so hard, she is maybe sobbing because she begins washing His feet with her tears and then she takes down her hair.

What this woman was doing was not how things were done. Women at this time did not take down their hair; they kept it covered as they still do. Normally the only time a woman takes down her hair is when they are in the bedroom. This woman taking down her hair in front of Jesus was very taboo and then she actually starts drying His feet with her hair. And yet she still isn't finished she starts kissing Jesus' feet and breaks open the alabaster jar. This jar of highly perfumed nard would

have been worth a lot of money and yet she has opened it and is anointing Christ's feet over and over and doesn't stop kissing His feet. What is going on here, how strange for someone to act in public?

What can be said of this woman? She did not know much about Jesus, but she knew that he was a friend of sinners. What desperation had led this woman to do such an act of love and sacrifice that would expose her to so much ridicule? She had hit rock bottom and had nowhere else to turn. She throws herself at the feet of this rabbi showing love in the only way she knew how, through touch. This sinful woman is broken. She knows she is a sinner. She knows what she has done with men behind closed doors. Her memories haunted her, her sin always before her. At the end of her rope she had no one else to go to, nothing left to live for, so she throws herself at the only man she thinks she can trust. In her desperation, her shame, her guilt, her hopelessness she falls at the feet of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Oh the risk this woman took! Breaking all social etiquette she threw herself on a rabbi she only has heard of not knowing how he would react! Would Jesus rebuke her? Would he threaten her? Would he refuse her love? <sup>1</sup>

No He doesn't rebuke her but turns to Simon while Simon sits there talking to himself about what is going on. Jesus speaks up and finally says to Simon and others seated at the table around him "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven, and hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The guests start talking around the table and they are asking each other, "Who is this who even forgives sins; he is no ordinary Prophet, no ordinary teacher." But we know Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the one true God who has the authority and power to look at this woman and forgive her of her sins. What this woman longed for more than anything was forgiveness and acceptance. Jesus gives it to her and says what has saved this woman is her faith.

This woman didn't care what anyone was saying about her, and maybe she was the woman of the street like everyone was saying, she was use to being talked about and she didn't care. Somehow she knew this time it was different, she may have been following Jesus around the area and saw what He was doing for others and she wanted that healing and forgiveness from Him also. That alabaster jar of perfume may be all she had left and it was worth a lot of money. Money which would get her through the coming months and hard times but she didn't want to live the life she was living any longer and was willing to do and give anything she had to receive His healing and forgiveness.

Imagine what she would have given up by holding on to her earthly treasure! She would have missed the opportunity to bless Jesus by kissing and anointing His feet and we would have missed hearing her story that can inspire us to give ourselves to Christ as she did.

We should ask ourselves are we as selfless and devoted as that woman? Jesus said the one to whom little is forgiven loves little, do we want to be known as the one who loves little and is

forgiven little, I don't think so. Are we willing to give up that which is precious to us to not only honor God but also be an example to those around us, what would others think?

If we become radical for Christ, willing to sacrifice ourselves and our possessions for Him, even those close to us may not understand. They become confrontational and tell us we don't need to give our all to belong to Christ, that we can still live our worldly lives with all our material gain.

How will we respond to them, will we rethink what we are doing, will we pull back and think maybe we are doing the wrong thing? Maybe Christ doesn't really want all of us and everything we have, there should be a part we hold unto, we deserve it, we worked hard for everything we have.

I think we need to stop right there, we are going in the wrong direction, we need to stop and ask ourselves: "What's in my alabaster jar, will I break it open and let go of what I have been holding on to?"

Let us begin to search our heart to see if there is anything hidden there that we want to treasure for ourselves. Would we be willing to pour it out freely to Christ? We may discover things in our jar that we are holding back and struggle with giving up even though we love Christ with all our hearts? By holding on to what is in our alabaster jar may be holding us back from opportunities to worship and praise Jesus, to start new ministries that will bless all those around us.

What's in your alabaster jar? And what are you going to do with it? We can't take any of it with us when we go. If we don't use it here, it's gone. Let us break open our alabaster jar and be fully used by Christ.

Amen