

## REDOLENT AFFECT

Odor ....can mean any type of smell we sense.

Redolent...describes a pleasant / fragrant scent.

Receiving an aroma is very tactile (physical), much like taste or touch. The odor particles engage our smell sensors, and then our brain interprets it.

Smell has a strong influence on how food tastes, and.... it is also profoundly connected to our memory.

Smell can be powerfully influential in affecting how we think and act.

A redolent smell is a central part of the episode in the John text.

Jesus, apparently, is spending time at the home of Lazarus, outside of Jerusalem. Bethany is very close to Jerusalem.

Lazarus, Martha and Mary--the hosts and likely other guests are present with Jesus, including Judas.

This Mary is Not Mary Magdalene.

After meal, Mary brings a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard to Jesus, and pours it out on his feet.

A pound is nearly one half litre; that's a lot of perfume.

**Nard** is made from the flowering plant Spikenard by distilling the crushed roots. The Spikenard plant does not grow locally in that region. In fact, it is grown in high elevations in India, and that is why it is so expensive.

It has a very intense smell, and was often used in the temple and for preparing dead bodies for burial.

Both tend to be holy situations, and therefore the odor should prompt memories of such referent moments.

Filled with a passion to honour Jesus, Mary, fortunately chooses to **not** anoint his head, but instead pours the perfume out on his feet; she poured it all out.

Can you imagine what happened? She probably wanted to avoid making a scene and didn't want to assume she had permission to anoint his head, yet instead she's drenched his feet.

The intense aroma is filling the room, saturating every nostril.

Everyone's olfactory [all-factory] senses have drawn all eyes on her, and to make matters worse, there is no towel handy,..... so without thinking, she uses her own hair to mop up the excess that is flowing off Jesus' feet onto the floor.

In a moment of emotional outpouring, Mary has created a commotion, overwhelmed the room with intense perfume and broken into uncharted territory with her very intimate encounter with Jesus.

Women were not suppose to approach men without invitation, and this was not just any man. Plus, she touched Jesus' feet. Feet were regarded as a very humble part of the body, and to make matters worse and even more dangerously intimate, she wiped her hair on his feet.

The shocking silence of disbelief was broken by Judas.

This was six days before the Passover, and Judas was in good standing as one of Jesus' 12 disciples. Interestingly, the name Judas means Judah, and translates "God is praised." Judas managed the finances for the group, and likely behaved like a business manager.

I think he had grand hopes and expectations for Jesus. He saw the potential in Jesus to really bring about change.

When a gifted, charismatic leader comes around, and starts to gain influence, it is not uncommon for people to project their wish list upon the person. In essence, turning that person into a "personal Messiah"--one who will fulfill one's personal agenda.

That happened when Obama was first elected. He was given Messianic exuberance by those who admired him.

It didn't take too long for most to realize his humanity.

Likewise, much was projected on and claimed of Jesus.... by those who wanted to own a personal saviour..... instead of following and serving.

Judas was rather perturbed by Mary's actions.

Perhaps, he was alarmed by her scandalous behaviour, and worried that it would tarnish Jesus' chances of impressing the leaders in Jerusalem?

Conventional wisdom states that aspiring leaders must be very careful about what people think. Even little slip ups can have dire consequences, and this touchy feeling exchange with Mary wasn't little. Moreover, maybe there was a touch of elder son jealousy. All of a sudden, this reckless and careless woman was getting the kind eye from Jesus, and the faithful, always taking care of business Judas was being usurped and ignored.

And, to be sure, her actions collided with the frugal, practical side of Judas. In his mind, there was the right way to do things (the way things are always done), and ... all else is wrong. Judas likely thought, dumping expensive perfume on someone's feet is just plain wasteful and wrong, it had to be. What good could come of it?

So, Judas broke the silence by trying to shame Mary with his accusation, "Why wasn't this expensive perfume sold for 300 denari and the money given to the poor?"

A denarius was one piece of silver worth a whole days labour.

That perfume was worth nearly a year's worth of work,...poured out on Jesus' feet,..... for no apparent, worthwhile reason.

The Gospel writer, John, pointed out that Judas' lofty assertion was all talk and nothing else.

It's easy to talk big / to inflate oneself, and it is all too easy to deflate another with "righteous" words that seem indisputable.

Criticizing someone by saying "you should have" is a potent method of shaming.

Notice how Jesus responded.

He confronted Judas and his shaming tactics and defended Mary.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone." He defended the victim,... and he restored her honour by affirming her intentions."

In essence, Jesus said, "I'm on her side."

Then, Jesus countered and exposed Judas' accusation.

In other words, Jesus said, "If you are suddenly so concerned about the poor, don't worry, they'll be around when I'm gone,..... because so far, you've done little to help free them from poverty."

Some people who are not found of social justice actions, abuse what Jesus said by suggesting it means that we should Not obsess about the poor. But, that is Not what Jesus said.

In addition, to standing up for Mary / affirming Mary's action and undoing the shame, Jesus also did Not empower the squeaky wheel.

Instead, he by passed it--moved on without it.

Too often, we sanction and enhance the negative energy / the negative, criticizing voice, and in so doing..... we become preoccupied and drained by the very thing we are trying to avoid.

There seems to be a tacit / unspoken rule in the church domain which states: at all costs, keep things calm and the passions low.

And that usually translates, "play it safe and keep doing what was done in the past."

That behaviour of placating is based on the erroneous assumption that we must keep everyone happy and content.

The purpose of the church is not to keep people happy and content.

The way of Christ is not the pursuit of happiness and mediocrity.

Moreover, this interesting dinner episode, featuring Mary and Judas, demonstrates that Jesus is not just another application to download and use as we wish.

Jesus was full of surprises. The Gospel accounts present, over and over, situations where Jesus broke from the norm / the old routine and did something new and different.

The Isaiah text presents the same message.

Verse 18 of Isaiah 43: "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing."

That passage prompts us to consider God making / doing new ways, God solving new problems with unthought-of "new" solutions.

God is full of surprises and fresh new ideas. God creates, and when we can't see a way out, God will make a new way.

And so, when we are not sure what to do or how to respond, then recall the story of Mary dumping perfume on Jesus' feet.

In her desire to please and delight Jesus, Mary, without restraint, poured out nearly a year's worth of earnings for Jesus, and then ignoring all sensibilities, used her own hair to dry his feet.

Some thought her actions shocking and disappointing.

However, it was Judas' reaction that was shocking and most disappointing.

At the very least, why didn't the smell of that sacred perfume conjure up memories of past holy moments?

Where was Judas' passion and devotion, and what was it about Mary that evoked such a negative reaction?

Was he trying to be in control? Did he need to have the illusion of control, stability and order in his world?

And, if that is possible,..... where is the invitation for love and for passion and the room for God's surprise?

The world we live in is very different than it was in new testament times. In fact, it is very different than it was 50, 40, 30 or 20 years ago.

We are not living / not alive if we are trying to force old ways in new days.

And, people who interpret Biblical passages like they did in the past, are killing God's living word.

If Jesus were around today, I can only image the surprising new and shocking things he'd be doing, including the marriages he'd bless.

Nevertheless, the new and unknown can be very unnerving and distressing, ..... unless.....we are confident that God is leading the way,..... opening up new and wondrous possibilities.

So, when in doubt, anoint what is good. Nurture the divine aspect.

Let us pour out all our energy and time anointing what is holy/ on what blesses and lifts up.

Let us praise all that radiates love and grace.

Let us defend and honour the weak, and never empower those who judge, degrade, live in the past or destroy.

May we expect surprise and extravagantly fill our world with the fragrant smell of God's love and grace.

It doesn't have to make sense.....when we pour ourselves out for God.

God will take our devotion. God will honour our passions, and great and glorious things will happen.

Let us overwhelm the world with love--all will be surprised.