

Sunday, March 8, 2026 Third Sunday in Great Lent Worship Sermon

“The Wasted Perfume” Pastor Takaaki Inoue

1 James 1:16-24, Matthew 26:6-16

❶ **【Mary Who Anointed Jesus】**

When Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly perfume. She sat behind him at the table where he was reclining at the head, and she poured the perfume on his head. According to the Gospel of John, this Simon the leper was Lazarus, and the woman who poured the perfume was his sister, Mary. The Gospel of Mark suggests Mary broke the alabaster jar. (Mark 14:3) Seeing this, the disciples became indignant and said, "Why this waste? She could have sold it for a high price and given to the poor." (vv. 8-9) They harshly rebuked her. Mark states it could have sold for over 300 denarii, indicating the perfume was worth over 3 million yen.

This is extremely rude. Mary was free to use her perfume as she wished, yet the disciples were dictating how others should use their possessions. It was also disrespectful to Jesus. They were essentially saying, "It's a waste to use such expensive perfume on Jesus." Here, the disciples' hypocrisy is revealed. They always lived by "calculation." They judged people and God based on whether they were useful to them, using both people and Jesus to achieve their own dreams. Therefore, even their act of giving to the poor was merely to gain popularity, not out of genuine concern for the needy.

In response, Jesus said, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. She poured this perfume on my body to prepare me for burial" (verses 10-12). Why did Mary act this way? One reason was gratitude for Jesus saving her brother Lazarus. Another reason, I believe, was that she knew Jesus would soon die. As Jesus said, this became "preparing Jesus for burial." When they laid Jesus in the tomb, there was no time to anoint Him. After the Sabbath ended, when the women carrying the spices went to the tomb, Jesus had already risen, and no one could anoint Him. Only this Mary anointed Jesus with perfume.

At the same time, pouring oil on the head is an act of "Messianic inauguration." Jesus was enthroned on the cross wearing a crown of thorns. Earthly kings did not acknowledge the King appointed by God and rebelled against Him. Mary's anointing was a confession of accepting Jesus as King. No one else poured oil on Him.

❷ **【Judas' Sin = Greed (Idolatry)】**

After this incident, Judas betrayed Jesus and received thirty pieces of silver (approximately ¥900,000) from the chief priests. This was the price of a slave. Why

did Judas betray him? The Church Fathers unanimously attribute it to “greed.” An ancient prayer text states it thus:

●Judas, blinded by the sickness of greed, sold you, the righteous judge, to an unjust judge. O you who are drowning in riches, behold the one who hanged himself for this. O soul that knows no satisfaction, shun those who fear not to do such things to their teacher.

Greed is the same as idolatry. It is an insatiable heart that squanders every blessing. Judas stretched out his hand for silver coins after receiving communion, and ran to the chief priests with feet that had just been washed. Though he was near Jesus, hearing His teachings and receiving abundant grace, he was not satisfied. For he clung to the idol of rebuilding Israel and pursued it. He did not truly hear Christ's words: “The Son of Man will be raised on the third day.” Had he listened carefully and remembered, he could have witnessed the resurrection on the third day. But he forgot the words, despaired, and took his own life. Judas lost both his life in this world and his life in the world to come.

③ **[The Wasteful Love of God]**

After this, Jesus said, “Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.” (verse 13), praising Mary. What Mary did was a prototype of what Christ did for us in the Gospel. Just as Mary broke the alabaster jar and poured out all the perfume within, Jesus broke His own body on the cross, pouring out every drop of His love, life, and forgiveness to all people. The Gospel of John states, “The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.” (John 12:3) This world is overflowing with Christ's love, life, and forgiveness. Love is here, right before our eyes. Judas asked, “Why this waste?” Yet it was Christ who truly wasted love. Judas too was loved with 100% love. His feet were washed, he partook of the Lord's Supper, yet Judas remained unaware and unsatisfied. Is it not the crucial thing to recognize this immense love of God?

What struck me here is that there are two kinds of Christians. Here we have Judas, who thinks only of himself, and Mary, who thinks of Christ. There is Judas, who seeks his own desires, and Mary, who seeks God's desires. In other words, there is Judas, who knows nothing of Christ, and Mary, who knows Christ. Which one does God delight in? Of course, the latter. Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Some misunderstand faith. They think faith is about pursuing what they need in this world. But faith is actually about knowing God's will and seeking to respond to it.

●Last week, I read the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete, a 4th-century

prayer book.

“Savior, I have defiled the garment of my flesh and clouded that which was created in Your image and likeness.”

“Sin stripped me of the garment of God's likeness, which God Himself had woven for me, and sewed me a garment of death.”

“I yielded to the torments of various desires and the decay of the body. Therefore, now the enemy accuses me.”

“O soul, you followed Ham, who laughed at the nakedness of his father Noah, avoiding to look and failing to cover your neighbor's nakedness (weakness).”

As I listened to these prayers, I realized something. We are so caught up in the busyness of daily life and its cares that we become completely blind. This is especially true of the rulers of this world. They pursue the wealth and power of this world and refuse to see anything else. Do you understand why, when David sinned, he did not pray, “I have sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba,” but instead prayed, “Against you, you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:6)? People of this world think sin is something committed against another person. But in truth, it is committed against God. As a result, our relationships with our neighbors are destroyed. All people have sinned against God. That is why we have become subject to decay, sickness, and death. This is an abnormal state. Yet we live as if death were normal, pursuing this world like Judah while remaining in this abnormal state. We hear the stories of the Bible as mere myths or moralistic tales. Our sin means we have destroyed the good things God created. We destroy ourselves, destroy others, and destroy this world. This is abnormal. That is precisely why we must acknowledge our sin, return to God, and begin the healing process to recover the beauty we have lost. As Mary continued to listen to Christ's words, I believe she gradually came to understand Jesus' thoughts, God's thoughts. Therefore, she offered the pure perfume. It symbolized her offering of her pure life. We too desire to offer Christ our pure hearts and pure deeds.