

## **Lenten Midweek Worship**

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

Coming to Our Senses: Smell

Wednesday, March 16, 2016

Rev. Amy Larson

Our Gospel reading tonight, from the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, as we explore the sense of smell is the reading we heard on Sunday. This story was the assigned lectionary text for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent and it is also the most helpful text for thinking about the sense of smell.

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our sense of smell is the sense most closely associated with our memories - smells take us back. For me, the smell of a certain brand of moisturizer always reminds me of my grandmother - she always smelled like Oil of Olay.

- She had a beautiful pink bottle of it on her vanity that my cousins and I loved to smell when we were little. Sometimes she'd let us put in on and we felt like glamorous movie stars.
- Once I dropped the glass bottle and it shattered. The smell filled the room as did my fear of my grandmother's wrath.

The smell of pine trees brings me back to a family cabin that we had to sell after deaths and conflict in the family. I have so many good memories there that now are a bit bittersweet. The smell of Indian food takes me back to when my husband Matt and I were living in Tanzania. We were struggling to get by when we lived there and the Indian restaurant was a place of rest and celebration. What smells do you associate with joy, with pain, with love?

This Gospel text tonight is full of smells:

- There's the smell of a dinner party. Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus are having a party - perhaps to celebrate that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.
  - There are all sorts of good smells coming from the kitchen - smells of love and feasting.
- There's also the smell of death on Lazarus.
  - Just before this story, Lazarus has been in the tomb.
  - When Jesus arrives at his tomb he says, "take away the stone"; but Martha protests saying, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."
  - Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, raises him back to life; but I'm sure the smell of death lingers with him even as he also bears the aroma of hope and new life.
- At this dinner party, there is Mary's extravagant gift of oil, the perfume of which fills the whole house.
- There's also the smell of a rat - Judas.

- The narrator gives us a whiff of Judas's story.
- He will betray Jesus, he has been stealing, and so we smell a rat there.
- Finally, there is Jesus, who at this point is less than a week away from the cross.
  - Is he smelling of fear, courage, conviction, dedication?

All of these smells are here in this one dinner party - love, celebration, death, betrayal, fear, and courage all mingle together. These are the smells of our lives as well - all the pain and beauty mingle together. This is our life of faith. A life of faith does not mean that everything will turn out smelling like roses. A life of faith is a life lived with Jesus, the One who has experienced all the pungent, poignant, fragrant fullness of our lives, the One who is present with us in all of it. A life of faith is a life lived in trust that the stench of death will be met with the overwhelming, abundant love of God poured out upon us in Jesus.

In the next week, we will enter into smells, sounds, sights and memories of Holy Week. We will experience love and pain all mingling together as we carry in fragrant Palms and sing Hosanna and and sit in silence and reflect the image of Jesus on the cross. We will ponder what it means that Jesus, reeking of trauma and anointed with spices by women, was laid in the tomb.

As we go through this week, notice the pain and the beauty, the hope and the fear all mingling together. Notice the stench of death and the fragrance of love. Let this cause you to reflect, not only upon what Jesus went through, but also upon the memories, the aromas, the joys and the sorrows in your life and Jesus' presence with you in them. As you reflect on Jesus' body, consider your own body and the way God is present and at work in the midst of the beauty and pain that we all carry within us.

Tonight for the prayer time, you are invited to come forward to the altar rail to have your forehead anointed with fragrant oil or remain in your pew to pray. To begin our time of prayer I will offer this blessing for the body by Jan Richardson:

Blessing the Body

This blessing takes  
one look at you  
and all it can say is  
holy.

Holy hands.  
Holy face.  
Holy feet.  
Holy everything  
in between.

Holy even in pain.  
Holy even when weary.

In brokenness, holy.  
In shame, holy still.

Holy in delight.  
Holy in distress.  
Holy when being born.  
Holy when we lay it down  
at the hour of our death.

So, friend,  
open your eyes  
(holy eyes).  
For one moment  
see what this blessing sees,  
this blessing that knows

how you have been formed  
and knit together  
in wonder and  
in love.

Welcome this blessing  
that folds its hands  
in prayer  
when it meets you;  
receive this blessing

that wants to kneel  
in reverence  
before you:  
you who are  
temple,  
sanctuary,  
home for God  
in this world.