

Sermon Title: A Stinky faith
John 12:1-7
April 7, 2019
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Focus:

God is doing a new thing: and maybe we don't perceive it because it is messy and embarrassing.

Washing feet is gross and it takes effort to look upon the mangled body on the cross. We are called to wash each other's feet, helping us to see the new thing God is doing.

Isaiah 43 proclaims new things are on the horizon.

The prophet Isaiah says....*God is doing a new thing, do you not perceive it?*

God is doing a new thing, don't you see it?

God is doing a new thing, don't you see it?

But If I'm being real, my answer is no.

I have never seen streams appear in the dessert.

I have never come to the edge of the water and seen the mighty waters part.

The people of God couldn't see the thing coming.

The disciples didn't see the new thing coming.

Do you see God doing a new thing?

Maybe we can't see it, but maybe, we can smell it.

Smells can stay in our memory and bring us back to places in an instant.

The smell of a Christmas tree. Or your grandmother's kitchen. the earthy smell of the garden.

The flowers about to bloom.

Smells are so powerful. Like fresh linens and laundry soaps. I'm suddenly a little girl playing in the laundry basket.

At the end of each row is a basket of dryer sheets. Pass it down your row and take one. Today we will rely not so much on our eyes, but on our noses. Bring it to your face and smell it (worry not, these are the all-natural, allergy friendly, compostable kind). What does the smell remind you of?

And smells can also point us to what is undesirable. So human. And it can be hard to be around strong smells... a really dirty diaper.....a full can of trash....morning breath....

A mouse once died in the basement of a house where I stayed and we could not even open the door for a month, because it was so potent.

My nose had told me, "Don't get too close."

There's a strong smell in our story today. We find out about it in John 11 - when Lazarus had died. The story goes that Lazarus was in the tomb for 4 days (John 11:17) and Jesus wanted to raise him from the dead, but Martha objected, "Lord, already there is a stench!" (John 11:39) Oh dear. So Jesus calls him out and then tells everyone else to unwrap him from his stinky grave clothes.

Not a pleasant task I am sure.

I presume that now, at the time of our story, about a week later, Mary and Martha could still smell it on Lazarus. That stench! Perhaps the scent lingered in their fingernails...and their clothes. Maybe they could smell it on Lazarus himself. Such a stench that they couldn't get rid of it!

The smell of death is everywhere....and Mary and her sister have been all up in it.

Mary and Martha have experienced something that none of us have. They perceived their brother risen from the dead....and, they've been doing this work of unwrapping the stinky clothes.

Now our story zooms in on Mary.

For Mary, it has made her bold. Brave. And vulnerable. She is shocking.

And in a vulnerable (and shocking) act Mary comes to this dinner party and gets right up close to Jesus' smelly feet. (Waaay too close for comfort) and lets her hair down (something a woman at this time and place would never do in mixed company.!) And she drenches Jesus' feet in perfume.

Mary is a *prophet!* She foretells the death and resurrection of Jesus. She prepares Jesus for his burial....and his resurrection. I can only imagine she does not want to relive that stench again! Maybe with all this perfume ahead of time, *before* Jesus dies, maybe it'll help with that stench!

And Mary is *priest!* She is doing the Holy work of anointing a king. Not just anyone can anoint a king. Priests are given the special task of anointing.

She is *shocking*.

I imagine the loooong awkward silence that follows her act. [silence]

Judas finally speaks up and protests (for good reason) that it was way too much.

But Jesus defends her as the only one who really “gets it”

The disciples don't get it. They don't understand this new thing God is up to.

God is doing a new thing, do they not perceive it?

NO! They are using their eyes to perceive, but our eyes can play tricks on us!

And their eyes are playing tricks on them.

Telling them Mary is out of line. Inappropriate. Sinful. Immodest. (Crazy. Loose. Slutty.)

But whether or not they can see God at work, now they will smell it.

Mary's perfume smelled up the entire house.

And this odor will cling to them wherever they go.

And in the midst of all the horror and stench of the events to come.... there will also be the sweet smell of perfume.

When Jesus rides through the parade on a smelly donkey...

Sweats blood in the Garden..

Is beaten, lashed, and mocked...

Works his muscles by carrying his cross up the hill....

Hangs limp with body decaying on that cross....

People will say to each other, wait, what's that? Do I smell perfume?

Brothers and sisters, it is so tempting skip over the gross parts of life.

This life stinks sometimes.

But today we are reminded to get close enough to the pain and suffering of our world to get a good strong whiff of it.

To smell each other's stench.

To inhale the stank of our community.

The potency of our world.

And the nastiness of the cross.

Getting close to the stench requires some really uncomfortable moments. And some really profound vulnerability.

Like Jesus did - I have to let people close enough to smell my stinky feet.

And I have to get close enough to smell peoples' stinky feet.

Every year on Maundy Thursday (or Wednesday as we do it here) I am tempted to take an extra-long bath and get a pedicure. It is that instinct that tells me that I know I need to wash more feet. I need to practice coming close to the messy parts of humanity.

Next Wednesday, when you come to wash feet, will you bring your *stinky* feet?

Washing feet is especially important for us to practice in church, where we are most tempted to put on our Sunday best and our church smiles and say everything is just fine....trying to hide our stinkiness.

But how will we learn to be community if we don't get close enough to smell each other's dirty feet?

Will we be able to walk with each other's disabilities and chronic illnesses?

Will we be able to sit with the dying?

Will we be able to do someone's dirty dishes?

To befriend the homeless?

It is in the uncomfortable places, the smelly places, even the gross places, that God is found doing something. Something new.

It might seem bitter at first, but Mary's perfume reminds us that not everything that smells is rotten. And even decay and rot become the fertilizer of lilacs and roses.

God is doing a new thing, do you not perceive it?

Well, you may not see it,

But can you smell it?

So take a deep breath in.

Because the resurrection isn't so far away that you might be able to smell it coming.