

DASHING THROUGH THE NO

DECEMBER 8, 2019

Mark 14:3-9: *While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.*

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages[a] and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Have you ever seen those Christmas Crackers the British love? Some people might call them Poppers. I'm not talking about anything Nabisco would make or deep fried jalapeños. I'm talking about those paper tubes that are decorated for the holiday, all shiny

and Christmassy. You pull on the ends, and POP! it springs open, and stuff falls out. It's like a tiny personal piñata you pull instead of hit.

I was talking to someone I love last week, and they said something that really hit me right in the gut. They were talking about family stuff — stressful. Work stuff — unbelievably stressful. And then there's some activity their kid does where the parents get involved and make it unnecessarily stressful, and they said, "I'm afraid one of these days one of those parents is gonna say the wrong thing, and I'm just gonna blow. And it won't be about them. It'll be about work and all the other stress in my life. But that's where I can pop, so that's where I will pop."

If someone pulled the ends of you right now, would you pop?

I was driving to CrossTraining on Wednesday, and I pulled off of MM onto 266 a little too slow, and the car approaching me was speeding, and I got honked at for a long time. He rode up to my bumper, flashed his brights at me.

When I turned onto AB, their car flew around me, coming so close that in the dark I could see the metallic flecks in their paint job. They hit their brakes, stopped their car, stopped my car. And waved — something — at me out of their sunroof. I kept thinking about it that night, how it was really an extreme reaction to being slowed down a little.

If someone pulled the ends of you right now, would you pop?

We don't meet Mary or Joseph before the birth of Jesus today. We meet Jesus near the end of his ministry. He's been born. He's grown up. He already has his disciples. They've already learned from him. They've already argued with each other. They're used to crowds following them around. But things are changing.

We're two days from the Passover celebration. The beginning of this chapter tells us the religious leaders were scheming how to kill him and trying to avoid doing it during the celebration because it would cause a riot. The very next passage after this one is Judas going to the chief priests to offer to betray Jesus for money. This is the tensest moment in Mark. The disciples are getting ready for a huge religious celebration, Jesus has been saying strange things about what's going to happen. They are worn thin and feeling anxious.

When this woman comes in. In Mark, she's not named. She's just some woman, carrying a fancy jar filled with expensive perfume. She goes to Jesus and pours it on His head.

Her presence and her action pulled on the ends of the disciples, and they popped. And what came out of them? Anger. Self-righteousness. The scripture says they began talking to each other indignantly. And it wasn't that she had interrupted their important meeting. It wasn't that the room smelled weird now. They were mad because she wasted the money. They could have used that money to feed the poor! She didn't do it right! That's not how you worship Jesus! They rebuked her harshly. They

didn't just gripe at each other. They started in on her.

Jesus stops them. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. *"Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could."*

I asked people this week on Facebook where they're feeling pressure in their life during the holidays. My pastor friends talked about the constant pressure of the holidays on the clergy. Having to be cheerful and look joyful while feeling the right things in the midst of writing the sermons and planning the services. Other folks talked about navigating family trouble or losses, about not having the time to do the things they really enjoy doing during the holidays — baking and shopping and decorating. And other people talked about the need to make things perfect, either to meet others' expectations or their own.

Buying the perfect present is rough, especially if money is tight. I heard a lot about money. And it's not just presents, it's presence, feeling like we need to do more than be somewhere. We need to actually show up and be present in all these moments, which are moving far too quickly.

These responses broke my heart. And warmed my heart. Because they were real and everyone could see each other's responses and know they weren't alone. It's not just me. It's not just that person I was talking to last week. It's not just the guy behind me on 266. It's not just you. The holidays are here, the demands for our money, our time, and our presence are higher than ever. We have 16 days to decorate, bake, hang lights on your house or put up a wreath or something because your house looks like a black hole in the middle of your neighborhood, cook, mail cards, buy or make presents, see everyone you wanna see and those you have to see, go to parties, Christmas programs, carol, remember to get something for the postal worker, try to keep our packages safe from porch pirates, listen to the

perfect amount of Christmas music but only hearing The Little Drummer Boy the number of times you can stand and remember through all of this that *Jesus is the reason for the season.*

So here we have two reactions to the presence of Jesus in a stressful holiday season. We have the disciples — who, if we're honest, we might be accidentally emulating. Trying to get it right. Trying to check the boxes. Feeling the pressure. And we have this unnamed woman who just walked in and makes a moment a celebration. Jesus says she was anointing him for burial. She probably didn't mean it that way. She was probably anointing him as her king. She took a single moment and made the absolute best of it with the best she had, loving Him, honoring Him, and He took it as honor. He took it as a celebration. He took it as love.

Listen to what he says to the disciples again. *"Leave her alone,"* said Jesus. *"Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could."* I am going to say this last line over and over again for the next 16 days, and maybe you can too — Mark 14:8a: *She did what she could.*

God, present in Jesus Christ, knows what really matters. Just showing love. It's not all of our trying.

All of our effort. And if all of that trying and effort and doing and showing up is going to make us an English Christmas Cracker of a human being, ready to pop, we're doing it wrong for Jesus. Truly celebrating Him is about seizing genuine moments to show love and *doing what we can.*

The song that kept coming to mind this week was one of the Christmas songs I've heard too many times already this year — the Little Drummer Boy. I'm parumpumpumped out. But the message in there — that the little boy shows up at the manger with nothing but his drum, so that's what He plays for the baby Jesus and it's good. It's received as love. That's my song this year. He did what he could. She did what she could. You do what you can. That's what God honors.

If someone pulled the ends of you right now, would you pop?

As you dash through this season, it's okay to say no. To say no to some of your stressors. Say no to something. To someone. To yourself. Say no to perfection, to doing all the things you're supposed to do. Say no before you pop. And say yes to the one who gets it. The one who celebrated the one who simply celebrated. Say yes to His love and to showing Him love. This holiday season, say no to something and say yes to Jesus. Amen.