

Adorning: What is your Fragrance?
Scripture: John 12:1-3 (The Inclusive Bible)

¹ Six days before Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, the village of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a banquet in Jesus' honor, at which Martha served. Lazarus was one of those at the table. ³ Mary brought a pound of costly ointment, pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair. The house was full of the scent of the ointment.

Whenever I smell garlic, onions, and sesame oil, I'm reminded of home, of my parents apartment in Los Angeles. I remember the first time I came home after finishing my very first final exams at my undergrad. This was the first time I've been away from my parents for a long extended period of time. It feels like it was yesterday: walking into the building; the fragrance of garlic, onions, and sesame oil filling every corner and saturating my pores. When I walked inside my parent's apartment, I saw a table adorned with all of my favorite side dishes, a bowl of freshly cooked rice, and my favorite: a big old pot of Kimchi Chigae. My mother's hands created this banquet, filling the room with the fragrances of heaven, overwhelming me with love. I cried many tears that night as I was eating that meal.

That memory, that moment, taught me a truth: **Our hands, our actions, create fragrances.**

This truth is also backed by Scripture! When the Israelites produced and gave animal & grain offerings to God, the priests would burn them at the altar, letting the smoke rise up to the heavens so that God can receive the fragrances. **And those fragrances moved God's heart toward forgiveness, blessings, and ultimately moved God closer to God's own people.** What we create with our hands, what we offer up to God produces fragrances that linger, that have the power to move God's heart.

Jesus was invited over to Mary & Martha's house where a banquet was prepared for Jesus. As they ate this delicious meal, Mary brings out an expensive ointment made of pure nard, held in an alabaster jar. She proceeds to break it over Jesus' feet, adorning and anointing them, wiping them with her hair, the aroma filling the house. **Mary & Martha's hands not only fed and allowed Jesus to experience love, but it was also a powerful act of justice.** Their hospitality and lavish giving affirmed Jesus' deep humanity and presence on this earth. While in contrast, in 2 weeks time, Jesus' humanity would be stripped away in one of the most violent forms of settler-colonialism: gratuitous death by lynching. When I think about this story, I am compelled to believe that the works of Mary & Martha's hands, the fragrances that were produced, were preparing Jesus and the disciples for what was to come.

As we are in the last leg of this Lenten season, a season of reflecting and re-evaluating who we are and who we belong to, there is a question that God has placed on my heart that I want to extend unto you: **What is your fragrance? What is the fragrance of Old South Church?**

In the short time that I've been here, I've been taking in the fragrance of this church and here is what I have discovered:

- We are a church with a painful history. We have housed the hands of abolitionists & freedom fighters, and the hands of enslavers. We are also in the process of slowly reckoning with that history through projects like the memorial tree in our columbarium.
- We are also a church that is on a journey, a journey of standing true to being a people after God's own heart, to be a congregation that honors God's love of justice. This is evidenced by when we:
 - Joined the New Sanctuary Movement to combat inhumane immigration policies.
 - Made an oath to tackle the climate crisis by transitioning into a greener church.
 - Not only addressed, but are actively trying to fight against racism through the creation and work of (G)RACE Speaks.

- Became active partners with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, and the city of Boston, to help create pathways for permanent housing for the unhoused.
- And when we fought for marriage equality and more fully integrating queer spirituality into our worshipping life, fully believing and affirming that our LGBTQIA+ siblings are created in God's image.

God receives the worship of God's people when it is saturated with works of justice. I don't know if Martha & Mary considered their banquet and adorning as worship, and they may or may not have known that they were active in God's liberatory work on earth. But OSC, I am here to tell you a truth: **God receives, blesses, and sanctifies worship when it is imbued with justice because: worship and justice go hand-in-hand**

I believe that God receives our worship because we have made a commitment to be a congregation that pursues justice. **Don't give up! Keep pushing, keep pursuing justice, and keep creating the fragrances that move the heart of God.** I believe that God is preparing us, OSC, to become greater vessels of God's justice and love in this world.

So again, I ask this question: **What is your fragrance? What is our fragrance? May it be one that moves the heart of God.**

Amen.

Benediction

May the love of God our creator, the saving grace of Jesus Christ our savior, and the liberatory presence of the Holy Spirit be ever present in your worship, in your holy pursuit of justice. May it be a fragrant offering unto God, and let the church say: Amen.

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I invite you to be seated as we continue honoring and celebrating the ministry of our 20th senior minister with memories & thanksgiving.