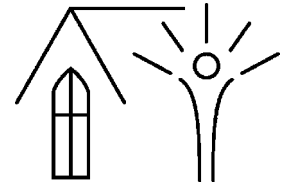




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Our Mission Statement:

*“To Know Christ,
To Grow in Christ,
To Show Others Christ”*

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“God Uses Cracked Pots”

John 12:1-8

Reverend Thomas Kim

On the way to the top of the highest peak in the French Alps there is a small inn. This inn provides rest and respite for mountain climbers. It is called the Mediocre Inn, which in French simply means “halfway.”

“Imagine coming off a day of climbing in the icy, windy French Alps,” says Dr. Jay Strack. “The cold has seeped into your bones. You’re exhausted, and every muscle in your body hurts. At the Mediocre Inn, you find a hot meal and a warm bed. You begin to relax, put your feet up, get comfortable. Who wouldn’t like that? But success is not found in rest and comfort. Success, reaching the top of the mountain, requires going back out into the cold and wind. It requires stretching and straining and working toward the goal.

“About 80% of climbers never go any farther than the Mediocre Inn. Once they’ve had a day or two of rest and comfort, they turn around and descend the mountain, never reaching the Alps’s highest peak. They lost the determination to reach their final goal.” (Secrets from the Mountain, p. 221)

We’ve all spent time there in Mediocre Inn, haven’t we? Maybe that’s why we like hearing about people who pick up where the rest of us leave off and make it the rest of the way to the top of the mountain. Our spiritual journey is not found in rest and comfort either. Sometimes it requires us to break out of the comfort zone to grow.

According to Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50, and today’s Gospel lesson from John 12:1-8, a woman took a pound of very precious ointment of pure nard and anointed Jesus. The woman was Mary and a prostitute. To make a long story short, it is one of the most dramatic changes of a person’s life in the Gospel. Mary once was a prostitute, but after she met Jesus, she became one of his disciples.

The Gospel of John says the price of the perfume she used was three hundred denarii, which was a year salary for a man. Wasn’t it wasting? I say it is a Holy Waste.

I led several mission trips not only to somewhere in this country, but also to foreign countries. Virtually any time I have prepared to take a mission trip, someone including my children has asked, “Couldn’t you do more good just by sending money?” Good question!

The answer to the question depends on how you define “more good.” Of course, we can buy more nails or paints with the money that are to spend on airfare and other expenses. But we do not have the human interaction, personal relationships; we do not have the face to face communication as the body of Christ, and we can not witness the love of a Christian family if we are not there. I’ve heard mission team members saying over and over again that after their mission trips, “I was a more blessed recipient of the grace of God than the people I served. I have taken blessings for granted, but not any more. This mission trip changed my life forever.” It is a holy waste.

The Gospel of Mark records, “She **broke** the flask to anoint the feet of Jesus.” Was it a mere action of breaking a flask or something else? It was not only a ceremony to anoint Jesus Christ but also a ceremony of farewell to her old self and life. I understand it as a goodbye to her past!

The more important thing for me is that Mary used the pure nard for a different purpose. The perfume was used to lure and attract men, and now was used to anoint Jesus before his crucifixion; the most holy way it could be used. What a dramatic change of the use of the perfume! A lure became sacred.

It happens in the world as well. Some concepts developed for war have been redirected into delightful peace-time pursuits. For example, centuries ago, in Spain, the Lipizzan horse was developed for war; now in Austria, these beautiful, graceful white horses are trained to put on highly skilled performances. So also the Jeep, originally developed for war, has many peace-time uses. Nowadays one of the most popular automobiles in America is Jeep or SUV, modified Jeep. For missionaries serving in remote areas, a jeep is known as the best vehicle to drive.

When she broke the flask of pure nard, Mary broke the flask of her old self. The flask symbolized and meant a familiar, easy, and old way of life. When she broke it, the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume, and her life was redirected, and corrected, and her gift was used for a different purpose.

Herman Hesse in his book, *Demian*, says, *"The bird flights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world. Who would be born must first destroy a world."* Yes, we must break a world or the flask of a sinful past, painful memories, bad habits and thoughts, ways of living and acting, guilt, shame, and the old self though it could be painful and wasteful. In Psalm 126:5, it says *"May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy."* We have to break a flask of our old self in tears to reap with shouts of joy later. The good news is this: As we break the flask, God blesses us with many gifts and grace. God redirects and corrects our lives, and God uses us.

To anoint Jesus God did not use Pharisees, priests, or any of the twelve disciples such as John, Peter or James, but Mary who had many pains and scars through her life. Do you know why? God uses cracked pots! Psalm 51:17 says, *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* The Message interprets it in this way, *"I learned God--worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice."*

Edward Sheldon said, *"God will look you over, not for medals or degrees, but for scars."* Vance Havner once described it this way, *"God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume..."*

In the book, *"God Uses Cracked Pots"* which I use for today's sermon title, Patsy Clairmont says, *"I am a cracked pot in need of divine repair. My prayer for myself is that God's light shines through my cracks. And my prayer for you is that you will find reprieve from life's pressures, which add stress to your pot, and that you might continue to shine brightly for God."* (p. 2)

Her writing reminds me of Paul, who says in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, *"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."* We may fail and fall to sin... however, God gives us an extraordinary power to overcome. I wonder, if we don't break our clay jars, how those treasures could come out? We say of an expectant mother, "Her water broke?" To give a birth to a child, the water must be broken.

And it's true. The tiny mustard seed can become a massive tree. But, first of all, we need to break the flask of old self, and that's why Mary broke the flask of pure nard. You and I have a bright, new life ahead of us. That is the promise of the scriptures. No longer need we be "The miserable ones." Mary had once been a prostitute, but became a disciple of Jesus. Her perfume had once been used in her prostitution, but was used to anoint the Lord. Mary was the same person, and she had the same perfume, but when she broke the flask, God redirected her life and her material, and the outcome was entirely different.

Let us think about what we can do to find new uses for our lives and gifts and abilities. Instead of abusing or neglecting our gifts inside, as we break our flasks, God will redirect and change our lives. Don't you want to see Jesus again in your life to redirect the usage of your life and gifts? Whether we reach to the top of the highest peak in the French Alps, or not, break the flask. God redirects your life, and corrects your life. God uses cracked pots. Amen.