

## “You Never Know Who You Will Run Into” Series: The Smell of Success

April 17, 2011

Texts: John 12:1-19

*Boker Tove!* Oh, excuse me, I mean “Good Morning.” I’m so glad you came to hear the rest of my story about Jesus. For those who may have joined us since last time when I shared a little about myself, I am Simon, the one who everyone calls “...the Leper,” Ha, Ha, Ha. Obviously, I am perfectly well now. But, before I met Jesus and he healed me, that’s what I was, an outcast leper. **Jesus set me free.** This is my home town, Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem to the east, “The most beautiful spot on the Mount of Olive this side of Jerusalem,” we say. This is where Jesus and the disciples often stayed when he came to Jerusalem including his last Passover. He had caused quite a stir here in Bethany and all the way to Jerusalem when he raising Lazarus from the dead; **called him right out of his tomb; set him free too.** Everyone got all excited that he really was the One we had waited for so long, the Messiah from God. But, not everyone was happy, like the Temple leaders who had it in for him and Lazarus too.

Well, me and Martha, Lazarus’ sister, felt we wanted to do something really special for Jesus and Lazarus. After all, it was like Lazarus’ **NEW Birthday**, Ha, Ha, Ha. So, we decided to throw a big banquet for them and his disciples and his entourage that went with him everywhere. Keeping up with all the money it took for that many people was a pretty good task for Judas; he had a good head for accounting. But, there was always something about him that made me wonder.

It was tough making ends meet with the heavy Roman taxes, but we were determined to celebrate this great occasion. Martha prepared some of their favorite recipes. Soon we were all ready and the guests arrived to fill my humble abode like when my mother, God rest her soul, reigned here. I was greeting our guests; Martha was busy setting the table, but where was Mary? I didn’t realize until she came in that she had been outside washing feet. What a precious, sweet soul she is, but clueless in the kitchen. It was a wonderful meal. Martha really is the best cook in town. There were lots of stories and laughter over the meal, but there was some tension in the air. Jesus didn’t seem to be enjoying himself much. Maybe it was the disciples jostling for the best seats close to him; Judas was especially good at it.

Mary slipped in quietly to pour more wine, but in a moment there was a glorious fragrance filling the house. We looked around and there was Mary on her knees pouring out her precious alabaster vile of imported perfume on Jesus’ head and feet. She was drying them with her long flowing hair that no

man had ever laid eyes on. She had bought it for the man-of-her-dreams. Who knew it would turn out to be Jesus. She wasn't wealthy, but what she did was extremely extravagant and even more intimate, very inappropriate in public even if they had been married. She adored him so deeply, with utter devotion, but not like a husband; it was spiritual, few could understand. **It was like Jesus set her free from all her fears.**

**The exotic fragrance filling the house made it seem like she was anointing the new King of Israel; that would be the Smell of Success.** Judas Iscariot spoke up about the waste of pouring out a pound of perfume worth a small fortune and rather selling it and giving the money to the poor. He always was a penny-pincher, but neither was he one to "waste" it on the poor either. **He sounded like a Pharisee!** Judas was already the treasurer; maybe he thought he was a shoe-in for that job in the new regime. Jesus silenced him with a word, "Leave her alone," and then he said her act was in preparation for his death. I couldn't stand it when he brought up that subject, his death; it was just so wrong. He had a big future for our country and nothing could stand in the way. We were ready for things to change around here, and we believed Jesus was the man to do it.

The next day, Jesus and his entourage headed to Jerusalem for the first day of the festival. Someone brought him a young donkey to ride. I loved it; that was perfect! It made him look like a royal dignitary! Finally, we thought the time had come for Israel to rise up and return to its glory days like under King David. I wasn't sure how Jesus was going to do it since none of us had any idea how to fight the Roman war machine. But, if he could call the dead back to life he could raise a mighty army. And, don't forget, Gideon won a great victory for Israel with just the 300 brave warriors. God had done it before; he was about to do it again, we all thought, and we were ready to die for him if that was what it would take. But, we were not ready for him die for us.

So many people turned out when they heard Jesus and Lazarus were coming to town that it was like a royal parade all the way from the Mount of Olives, across Kidron Valley, and all the way up to the eastern gate of the Temple, the "Golden Gate". They even rolled out the "Green Carpet," so to speak, branches of palm trees along the way. The disciples were eating up the attention, especially Judas who was walking along side Jesus, grinning from ear to ear. They were chanting an anti-Roman slogan from the Psalms (118:25-26), "**Hosanna! Save us, O God, Save us, O King, Bring us the victory,**" and "**Bless the King of Israel who comes in the name of our God.**" It seemed everyone was jumping on the royal bandwagon, everyone except the Sadducees and Pharisees. They were visibly upset, talking among themselves and giving condescending stares. It seems the whole world showed up for the parade so what could the Jewish leaders do anyway? It was

electrifying, the anticipation of what may happen that week. This festival would be one to remember for sure. Maybe, this could mean the beginning of the mythical “Year of Jubilee,” when all debts were canceled, all property returned to the original owners, all slaves and prisoners set free? Now, that was something to get really excited about for us poor folks. Nearly everyone had friends or family in debt for Roman taxes and some in jail. Could that be what the new Kingdom would be like- **To be set free?**

In spite of all the hoopla, Jesus was unfazed. Sure, he was pleasant to everyone, but it didn't impress him one bit. He had a lot on his mind. We just dismissed his plans for sending the Romans packing and taking over the government. Little did we know what he was **REALLY** dealing with. Every day in the Temple there were throngs surrounding him. If the authorities wanted to catch him, the people wouldn't have stood for it. He just kept showing up in spite of the risk. He knew they were out to get him, but he was there for the people. That is how you could describe his whole ministry; **he was always there for the people – to set them free.**

We didn't know it at the time, but success for him wasn't to take a throne or a crown of gold, only a crown of thorns. With him, everything was always about others, through the hunger and the tears, walking those dusty miles and exhausting years, just to reach the common people, even the lowest outcast like me, a leper. No one was too low or too miserable to keep him from caring. And, in the end, even the common criminal was worth to him more than his own life.

**For Jesus, the Smell of Success was his fragrant offering he lifted up on the cross to God!**

The victory he won for us was not about overcoming political or financial power, but overcoming the power of sin in the life of every person who ever lived, for you and me, **to Set Us Free from Sin!** That is the message he came to bring us from God, who he called Daddy.