

Lake Cities Community Church  
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Series: On Your Mark

**How Much Does It Cost?**  
Mark 11:1-11

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“How much does it cost?” That was the frequently asked question from the hundreds of Bachajon Indians who stood in line in 1965 to purchase the first ever translation of the New Testament into the Bachajon language. *“How much does it cost?”* It had taken Wycliffe Missionary Marianna Slocum eight years to finish the job, which may seem to be a long time, but it was nearly half the 15 years it took her to translate the NT for the Tzeltal Indians – another tribe deep in the jungles of Mexico. She had started work there in 1943. Two translations of the New Testament in 22 years – not bad work for a single woman from Philadelphia! And once the dedication of this Bachajon Bible was complete, she was heading to her third project high in the Andes mountains of South America. *“How much does it cost?”* Marianna Slocum turned to face the young Indian woman who asked her the question. She was ready to pay for her Bible. Marianna thought for a moment about the question - turned to her and said with deep satisfaction - “Only seventeen ½ pesos”. She joyfully gave the woman her Bible.

Marianna Slocum is one of the great heroes of the faith. How much did it cost her to produce those three translations of the Bible? It cost her everything – her whole life. From her biography this account is written of Marianna and her co-laborer, Florence, “For both women the task seems insurmountable. Marianna worked long hours each day, struggling with the complexities of the language, and Florence struggled against the alcohol, filth,

superstitions, and the demonic powers of the local witch doctor. And for all their struggles there were so few signs of success.” But because of her life of great sacrifice she lived a life of great significance. And so it has always been following Jesus. Whether you are a missionary, a mother or a mailman - the more fully you give yourself to Jesus Christ the more powerfully he uses you and the more joy and fulfillment you will have.

I read a blog this week written by a young man on his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. He wrote, “I spend my time sleeping, watching movies, playing computer games and doing nothing. Is my life of any good to anybody? Or is it any good to even myself? Probably not. Has my life been a waste? Have I done nothing in life worth *something*?” That reflects many people in our culture. But the saddest part of the BLOG was that at the end he decided his own happiness was his highest priority and so he concluded nothing needed to change.

How about you? Are you doing something worthwhile for God? Or are you content with a life that caters to your own comfort and happiness. Are you willing to serve the Lord completely? How much does it cost? It will cost you everything

Turn with me to Mark chapter 14: 1-11. In our passage this morning, we will see a contrast between those who are not willing to give up anything to follow the Lord - the enemies of Jesus, and a woman who is willing to give it all. Mark 14:1-11.

### **Plotting to Kill Jesus (1-2)**

Mark 14:1 Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill *Him*;

Mark 14:2 for they were saying, “Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people.” The Chief Priests and Scribes in Mark represent those who are not willing to

give up anything to follow Jesus. They want to hold onto their power and traditions at all costs. And so in the beautiful temple, in conference room “A” they began a brainstorming session. No idea is a bad idea! But most ideas were shot down as they would lead to riots. There were upwards of 300,000 people in Jerusalem – a city of normally 60,000 – and most of them are on Jesus’ side – they had to be very careful. “Nobody goes home until a working plan is drafted,” says the chairman. It was going to be a late night.

### **One Woman’s Devotion to Jesus (3-9)**

Now in verse three, we have a strong contrast and the woman is introduced to us. *While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head (3).* Before we go on, just notice we are in a Mark sandwich. The two pieces of bread consist of the enemies of Jesus – and in the middle is the story of the devoted woman. Mark links the stories together as one unit.

Now, Jesus is in Bethany a suburb of Jerusalem – just east of the town and he is in the home of Simon the leper – perhaps a man whom Jesus had healed. “*Contrast,*” Mark says, -- the great temple with the unclean home for a former leper.

And into the scene comes an unnamed woman. We don’t know if she is rich or poor. We do not know her relationships with Jesus or with the homeowner. We are not given her name. Mark is only interested in a few details. First that she has in her hand a very costly alabaster jar, filled with an even more expensive perfume of pure nard. The perfume is worth an incredible 300 denarii – a year’s wages for a laborer. The average salary for a carpenter today, for example is \$35,000. It is a \$35,000 bottle of perfume. She

takes the vial and breaks it and pours all of it on the head of Jesus. Every drop, right on top of his head and it flows down his hair onto his beard. And the room is filled with a beautiful sweet smell.

The woman brings Jesus a costly gift – probably the most precious possession she and her family possesses. She brings a costly gift and gives it completely to the Lord. She demonstrates generosity, extravagance and her complete devotion and faith in Jesus.

Paul Harvey used to tell the story about when the Butterball Turkey Company set up a hotline to answer consumer questions about preparing holiday turkeys. One woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in her freezer for twenty-three years. The operator told her it might be safe if the freezer had been kept below zero degrees the entire time. But the operator warned the woman that, even if it were safe, the flavor had probably deteriorated, and she wouldn't recommend eating it. The caller replied, "That's what we thought. We'll just give it to the church." So often when it comes to following Jesus we give our leftovers. After I am taken care of – then I will see what is left for the Lord's work. Not this woman – she gives everything to Jesus.

And as you can imagine not everyone was happy with this extravagant offering, Mark 14:4 But some were indignantly *remarking* to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? Mark 14:5 "For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and *the money* given to the poor." And they were scolding her. What a waste! \$35,000 dollars – dripping onto the floor. Hospitality is one thing – anointing a visitor, washing his feet – fine. But that is downright irresponsible. What about the poor? What about the coming Kingdom? What about the budget deficit? We can relate to these objections – it seems so extreme – but what the disciples miss – and the woman

understand, is the true identity of Jesus. To break the bottle on Peter's head would have indeed have been a waste. To anoint Andrew with this would have been inappropriate – but nothing is ever wasted in worship of the Lord. They still don't understand this. Jesus says:

Mark 14:6 "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. Mark 14:7 "For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. Mark 14:8 "She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Mark 14:9 "Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

The woman's gave Jesus a costly gift and she gave it completely. And as a result receives a tremendous complement from Jesus. Jesus gives her a trifecta complement. First, Jesus says, she has done a good (Greek: beautiful) thing. Second, she has done what she could – all that was within her resources. Third, what she has done will always and forever be linked to the gospel. It is linked to the gospel in that her anointment of Jesus is preparation for his burial. Now whether the woman knew or not whether Jesus was going to die, we don't know. Either way, her costly, complete act is complemented. Wouldn't you like to receive a complement like that from Jesus?

In the 1985 movie Anne of Green Gables – the late Colleen Dewhursts played the complex character of Marilla Cuthbert. She is a woman of common sense, integrity, faith and a woman who does not give complements freely. Her complements are so few and far between that when they come up in the story they are significant and you pay attention. She says to Anne: "I think you may be a kindred spirit after all" and everyone cries – it is so

meaningful. Now, Jesus was not gruff and stoic like Marilla, but like her, Jesus does not give too many complements. And so, when he does, we need to pay attention. Jesus is upholding this women to his disciples and to us as a true disciple -- Like the widow who dropped her last two coins in the offering she gave it all – and that what Jesus requires.

Over here – we have the spiritually blind. In their fancy church building, they give nothing for Christ – but only want to take his life. They have no faith. But... over here, in the home of a leper, is a woman who gives everything to the Lord – she is our example. And here in the middle are most of us. Like the disciples we have some faith and are following Jesus. But we are confused. We condemn when we should commend, and we still don't see clearly who Jesus is or what He is doing.

### **Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus**

Mark 14:10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. Mark 14:11 They were glad when they heard *this*, and promised to give him money. And he *began* seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time. Mark is moving us in the narrative quickly toward Jesus' death. Feeling the loss of so great a sum of money – Judas, the treasurer, has had enough and agrees to betray Jesus. He finds the enemies of Christ in the temple and interrupts their brainstorming session. They receive him with a prayer of thanksgiving – and promise to pay him for his deed.

The woman will be forever remembered for preparing Jesus for burial. Judas will be forever remembered for arranging his death. Judas' sin will lead to suicide and death. The woman's faith leads her to life and joy. In the contrast we find the message of the story.

## Application

And so as we come to the conclusion of this story - the question for you and I is: "What costly gift do you have that you can bring to Jesus – that you can give completely to the Lord?" There is only one such gift that we all have to give. Really only one thing that the Lord requires – **your life**. All of it. Completely poured out for Him.

In 1941 Marianna Slocum became engaged to Bill Bently a fellow Wycliffe missionary doing translation work in Mexico. They fell deeply in love. But six days before their wedding he died of an undiagnosed degenerative heart condition. She was devastated. But he had said to her this, "If something should happen to one of us – the other must continue on with the work." And that is what she did. She served the Lord on the mission field her entire life "How much does it cost?" (Slocum's biographer wrote) "This was the oft-repeated question as the Indians stood in line. Seventeen and a half pesos was, of course, the answer to the question they had in mind, but the actual answer could never be given in pesos. Loneliness, illness, unfriendliness, primitive living conditions and the sacrifice of marriage and family all made up the cost of the Bachajon New Testament. It was a heavy price, but one Marianna gladly paid." (*From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya, Ruth A. Tucker, 363*)

On Saturday morning my phone rang. It was Marianna Slocum. She is 91 years old, in excellent health, and lives with her fellow missionary and friend of 60 years, Florence Gerdel. They live in south Dallas one block from the International Wycliffe offices. I had tried to contact her through Wycliffe web site and a Google search. There had been some mix-up on the phone number, but Marianna's niece found our church website and my cell

phone number. I could not believe I was talking to the woman I read about in my missionary book. It was incredible! We chatted for about 15 minutes.

I explained to her that I was preaching from Mark 14 – about the woman who gave a costly gift completely to the Lord, and how I wanted to tell you all to give your lives completely to the Lord. That it is worth it! I told her I had looked up the word “sacrifice” in the index of the book – and her name was listed there and that is how I found her story.

So I asked, “Tell me about the sacrifices you made as a missionary.” And she said, “I never considered any of it a sacrifice but a privilege and a joy.” She must have said that three times! And I thought – there it is! I bet that if you asked the woman with the alabaster jar – “How did you feel sacrificing so much.” She too would have said – “It was not sacrifice at all – it was Jesus I gave it to – what a joy and privilege.”

It may seem like a sacrifice to follow Jesus – but the secret is... that it is really no sacrifice at all – but a huge blessing! “My yoke is easy and my burden is light,” said Jesus. Marianna said to me in closing, “To see people come out of darkness, and witchcraft, and fear of the devil and to be delivered into the marvelous light of Jesus.” She said, “What more could you ask for?” There is nothing more you could ask for. Give you life to Jesus. Give if completely – and you will be blessed beyond what you could ever imagine.