

“She Did All She Could”
John 18:33-37

November 21, 2021
Christ the King Sunday
From the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL
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Today I offer a sermon in parts.

#1. Where were you four years ago today?

I was right here. In this pulpit. It was my first time. The sanctuary was fuller then than I’ve ever since seen it. Your Pastor Nominating Committee had put my name in nomination to become your next senior pastor. I was here preaching my candidate sermon. Afterwards you voted to call me as your pastor. My wife and boys were here. There was applause. We had cake. It was a big celebration.

Do you remember that day? That sermon?

I do. I remember both.

It was Christ the King Sunday. I told the story of Jesus standing before the Roman Governor Pilate hours before he would die on a cross. The Roman governor was eye to eye with not the King of the Jews, but the King of Creation. In that sermon I suggested that the best we could ever do was to focus on Jesus in our ministry together. If we did that, I asked how could we fail? I told you that it would be best not to think too highly of me, because despite my formidable ego, I wasn’t worth following. But Jesus definitely was. I’m still not. And Jesus still is.

The words we use on Christ the King Sunday are these: Christ is King.

Four years ago, I urged us not to lose sight of this reality. I urged us do our very best to serve Jesus. Any preacher worth his or her salt would have done the same.

#2. When I was at Seminary, my wife Rachel preached a sermon called “She did all she could” and it was one of the best sermons I’d ever heard. I don’t remember details except for the fact she repeated the phrase, “She did all she could” as a refrain. She pounded it like a hammer. She rang like a bell. “She did all she could.” I was so inspired.

Rachel was referring to the story we find in Mark’s gospel. In chapter 14:1-9, just before the Passover, Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. As he sat at dinner, a woman came with an alabaster jar of high-dollar perfume and poured it on Jesus’ head.

Some disciples were infuriated because the perfume was expensive and could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus corrected them. The poor will always be with you, and you can (and should) always do good things for them. But Jesus wasn’t going to be around long. This woman had done a good thing, Jesus said. She honored Jesus. She revered him. She went to every expense to show respect. She prepared his body beforehand for burial.

(When John tells this story, the woman anoints Jesus’ feet and she kneels and dries his feet with her hair. Imagine that scene of devotion.)

Jesus tells his disciples: *Don't complain. This woman has done a good thing for me. She has given all she could give. She has done all she could do.*

I've stolen Rachel's sermon title all these years later. "She did all she could do."

"Truly I tell you," Jesus told his friends, "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Christ was king, and she knew it. She did all she could do to honor him.

#3. This observation gets into the story of you and me: That woman in Bethany risked a lot to honor Jesus. And she gave a lot. And the implication of this story is that we are invited to honor Jesus by giving and doing a lot. What have I done lately? What I have given lately? How well have I lived? Have I opened myself up—have I surrendered—to God to use me?

That woman did all she could do.

Have I done all *I* can do? Have I even come close?

Christ is king. Have I served with *all* my allegiance?

#4. Recently, on the radio show called *The Moth*, Jason Schmidt tells the story of growing up poor. He and his dad bounced around for one tough situation to another. Jason always marveled at how his father could always turn any situation around. He always had a way of making things work out. Jason always looked upon his dad as a magician and hero.^[1]

Jason and his dad once moved to another northwestern city. Before they left, they went to camp in to the woods, to say goodbye to the forests they both loved before moving to a faraway city. Jason got sick. His dad bundled his boy up and took him to the hospital. The expensive medicine ate into the money his dad had saved for the rent for a new apartment. Jason was very sick. They couldn't travel. They went back to the forest. They bathed in the river. They lived in the car. Jason's fever finally broke. That's when Jason realized they weren't camping anymore.

They were homeless.

He no longer saw his dad as a magician or a hero. Jason saw his father as a human being doing the very, very best he could. Jason loved his dad for it.

Jason's dad did all he could. He served his son with everything he had.

#5. We have gathered at the font with little Eliana and her parents Claris and Olando. We confess our faith in Jesus. And together we pledge that we are going to do the very best we can do in Jesus' name for and with this little girl and her family.

#6. We aren't called to save the world. God does that, and we aren't God.

We aren't called to be cosmic magicians or super heroes.

We *are* invited, instead, to be our best selves and simply to follow Jesus. To adore, to thank, to praise. We are invited to take one faithful step after the next, to honor Jesus by loving others. By being kind

and thoughtful. By caring about justice and mercy. By being good stewards of our gifts. By sharing our lives and energies for the common good. We are invited to be disciples.

Nobody may notice the contributions we make in this life, the ways we care for others, the kindnesses we share. But God will notice. God will notice those moments of devotion.

And as we rightly serve, we may catch a hint of perfume in the room.

And we'll remember that woman in Bethany, whose example we are invited to follow. We'll remember that woman in Bethany who knew that Christ was king of her heart, and to serve and honor him, *she did all she could*.

AMEN and AMEN.

John 18:33-37 33Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Mark 14 It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus^[a] by stealth and kill him; 2 for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

3 While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,^[b] as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. 4 But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? 5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,^[c] and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. 7 For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the good news^[d] is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

^[1] Moth Radio Hour, "Sit Tight, Kid" by Jason Schmidt, on Red Sox, Jerusalem, and Coming Home, October 18, 2021 (I think).