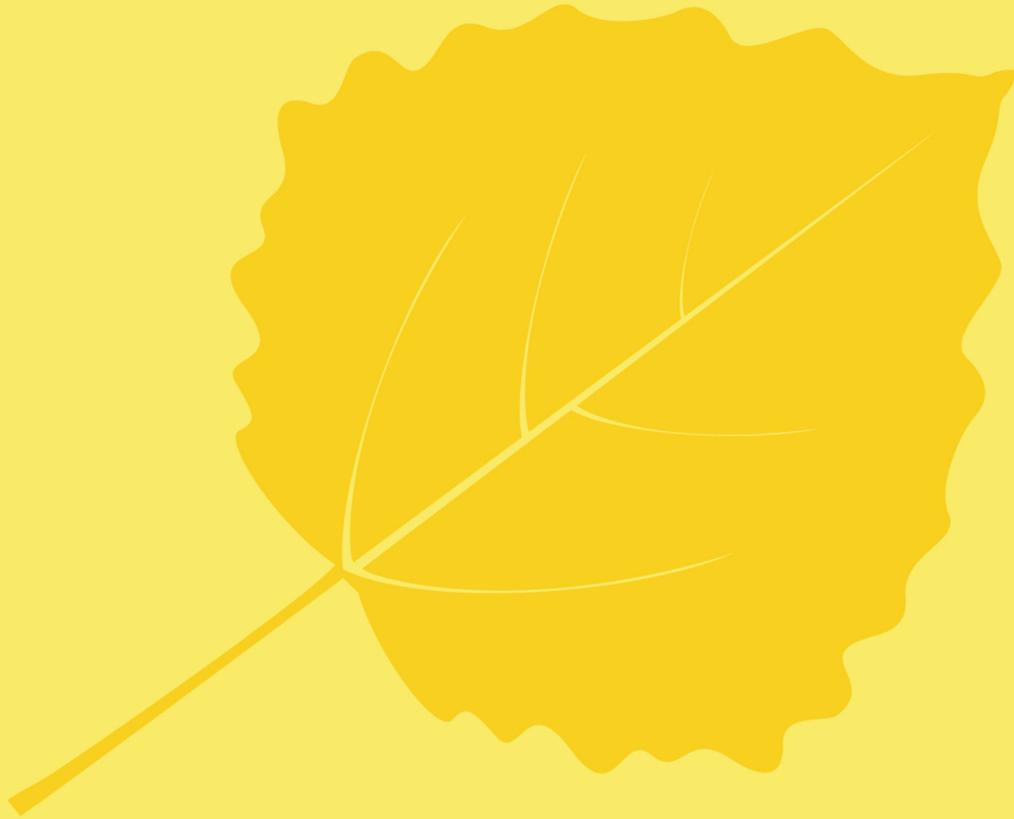


1stTHINGS1st



What's really in first place in our lives? We say God is first, but our schedules, commitments and finances tell another story. Setting God in the highest place is not just right, it's good! When God is first, everything else falls into place. It's time to let God be God. Let's study our priorities until God is at the head of our lives and order everything around Him through worship, obedience, service, prayer and generosity. God in first place—let's put **First Things First**.

FIRST ON MY CALENDAR • Matthew 26:1-13 • Tim McConnell • August 27, 2017

What is your most valuable commodity? I'll give you a hint, it's not your shoes. It's not your golf clubs. It isn't parked in your garage—and it isn't your house. What is it? You know what it is. Let's say it together. What is your most valuable commodity? That's right, it's your hair. Once that's gone, it's not coming back. No. It's your time. Time is our most valuable commodity. We all get some, although none of us knows how much. We all get to spend it at the same rate. Each bit of it, each segment you portion out is spent only once and never returns. Time is your most valuable commodity. Does God get your time? We want to put God first in every aspect of our lives. If we don't give God our first thought we won't give God a second thought. Is God first in your distribution of time? If Christianity were illegal and you got arrested, would your calendar be enough to convict you? There's a deviation between what we *intend* and what we *do* sometimes, a gap. I say God is important. I even *believe* in my heart of hearts God is most important. But somehow when I live, when I distribute my time this conviction doesn't show up. This series is designed to close that gap. Let's put God first on our calendar; let's encourage one another to make God our first priority with our time—I want to give God my best first.

Today's passage is about this moment in Jesus' ministry when a woman decided, somehow, "This is it, I'm not messing around anymore—Jesus gets my best first." We call it the anointing at Bethany. Now you careful Bible readers, we have a decision to make. Is this the same event recorded in John 12 and Luke 7? It's exactly the same as the Mark 14, but there are differences in the others. For what it's worth, I go with the very early interpretation here from the church fathers that there are actually three different anointings recorded in the four Gospels. So I'm not going to match this event up with Luke 7 or John 12, but it is the same as Mark. Okay. What happens? During Passion Week as we call it, after Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday but before he was arrested and crucified, they are gathered in Bethany about two miles outside of the city. During these festivals everyone stayed in the suburbs and walked in for the activities. So that's where they were, hosted at the house of Simon the Leper when something extraordinary happened.

A woman comes in with an alabaster flask of very expensive perfume; Mark tells us it might have been worth a year's wages. Alabaster is a soft stone you can carve easily. I joined our Global Engagement

team in Egypt this January and we saw shelves and shelves of alabaster flasks in the museum from this time period. Delicate jars and flasks with long necks and very small holes at the top. The perfume inside, "nard," was thicker than honey so to get just one drop to come out took some effort—but of course that's all you would use. One drop would do you. In those times there was less washing and more covering up your smell with perfume—like middle school boys when they discover Axe Body Spray. Just blast it on! One drop would do. But the woman wants to give it all. She wants an extravagant gesture. She wants to give Jesus her best first. So she breaks the neck off the flask Mark tells us, as she would have to do to pour it all out and empties it all on Jesus' head. The fragrance, you have to imagine, takes over the house and even wafts out into the streets full of festival goers. This was an overwhelming experience for everyone involved. Not a nose missed it! This is physical, it's emotional, it's communal—everyone is a part and you can't help but get wrapped up in it. It's an event. It's moving. It's unmistakable. It's worship.

"Waste," the disciples cry. "Waste." Ready to show they are smarter than her, that they've been listening to Jesus and His concern for the poor, they explain (or "mansplain") this could have been sold, given to the poor. "Aware of this, Jesus said to them, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.'" (Matthew 26:10-11) In no way is Jesus disregarding the needs of the poor, but what He is saying is two things. First, if you really cared for the poor they are always present. You probably walked by a poor person today. Did you do anything? He turns their spiritual pride and superiority into a moment of conscience. But second, Jesus is saying something here about the proper response to His presence. In this case, to His incarnate presence, His presence in the body, but I believe it true about His spiritual presence when Christians gather—His presence is worthy of extravagance. When Jesus is there and we are celebrating His presence with us, He is worthy of our best first. Don't devalue worship because you failed to exercise charity. That's bad on bad. Not waste. What does Jesus call it? "A beautiful thing." "She has done a beautiful thing to me." What if you could do one thing in your life that you knew Jesus would say, "When you did that—that was a beautiful thing." Verse 12, Jesus explains "When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial." (Matthew 26:12) Then Jesus adds

the further notice: "Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Matthew 26:13) But nobody got her name! And all the women in the room say, "typical!" But here she is. And her moment is right in front of us, her convictional moment when she said, "I'm in. I'm all in. No more little bit here, little bit there. Jesus gets my best first!"

What motivated her to do it? What would motivate you to take one more step toward Jesus? One big step out of the boat, into His arms, like this? I see a few things here. Go back to verse 6: "While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper," (Matthew 26:6). Simon the Leper. I've had some bad nicknames in my life! Simon the Leper. Obviously it's Simon who was a leper before Jesus came to him. Now he's healed. Now he's well. And all the laws and customs that kept him isolated for so many years are all put away, and Simon, Simon can host the Rabbi, Simon can host the party in his own house! Maybe the woman knew him when he was sick. Maybe she knew the pain of his isolation and illness. And she saw how Jesus changed his life. This Jesus is worth trusting. He is worth my best first.

It could be that she had heard of the other times Jesus was anointed. How Mary had anointed His feet with spikenard or how a prostitute had come in for forgiveness and had literally washed His feet with her tears and her hair, and she thought about her own alabaster flask. Or maybe she knew that the councils were meeting already planning Jesus' execution. The walls had ears; rumors had to be flying. Long meeting of the Sanhedrin last night—this one has to die. She thought of His death and it broke her heart. What can I do? I can give Jesus my best first. But above all it was clearly love that moved her. Love for the light of Christ. Love for the kind of love found in this man Jesus. What can I give to the Lord? If I give all I have, it's nothing compared to what He deserves. She cracked open her best and poured it all out to Jesus, her first.

We want to put first things first. We want to give God our first thought, knowing that if we don't give God our first thought we won't give God a second thought. Where is God when it comes to your use, your pouring out, your dispensing of your most precious commodity—your time? Here we go. This is it. Let God be your first appointment in the day. Let God be your first commitment in the week. Why a ten-week worship challenge? Because somehow we can't find one hour in 168 to worship God these days. Crack open your calendar and pour your time

out on Jesus. First appointment in the day—"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mark 1:35) Is time with God in prayer and reading the Bible on your calendar in the morning? First commitment in the week. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). "It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High," (Psalm 92:1) the Psalm for the Sabbath day. Is there time for worship? One hour on the first day of the week? Crack open your most precious, your first best, and give it to Jesus. It isn't that we take time for Jesus, it's that we give time to Jesus.

I remember when I was in my Chaplain Officer Basic Course in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Tank hill! Before you get too excited, this course is called the Army's last gentlemen's course. I'd be embarrassed for any of you real warriors in the room to learn how many rounds of golf I fit in during this training—but I knew that course like the back of my hand. Still we had busy and full days with physical training starting at 5 a.m. I remember our class leader, but I can't remember his name. He was African-American from a non-denominational church and was already a captain; he was a great leader for us. He got up every morning, we learned, to spend at least thirty minutes with the Lord before the day began. Often that meant his alarm went off at 4 a.m. I was joking with him about it once. "Man, that's serious! You're a holy roller." He told me a little about his life before knowing Jesus, where he had come from, and said he really didn't mind. He liked giving that time and liked going through the day having started with Jesus. But I was still poking at him, the way Christians do, the way pastors do sometimes, "Yeah, but 4 a.m.! That's crazy. I mean you're like a monk or something." Then he looked me in the eye, and I'll never forget this, he said, "Tim, Jesus gave His whole life for me. I can get up for Him." It wasn't mean, what he said. It wasn't hard-hearted at all, but for me...it struck me in the gut. I confess it remains a conviction to me to this day. What I was only ready to joke about, he was ready to do. I set my alarm early the next day. But I couldn't keep it up. It's still a struggle to be honest.

Can we crack open our calendars for God? Can we pour out a little more of our most precious commodity? Give God our best first? First appointment of the day; first commitment in the week. Just open up your calendar on your phone. This is what it looks like. Just open up the app, pick an hour on Sunday: 8:30, 9, 10, 11 or 6:30. Type "church." Hit "Repeat...Weekly." That's what it looks like. What goals do you have

in your life? Make the sales quota; get two major projects in this year; make Senior VP by 2020; get ten books published. Whatever. Good goals. Worthy goals. But how about a goal like this? Spend time every day with the Lord who gave His whole life for me. Worship the Lord with His people one hour a week. Worthy. Worthy is the Lord to receive our best first.

The unknown woman cracked open her very best. Her gift is her very best poured out for Jesus—poured out on Jesus! And Jesus explains, “When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.” (Matthew 26:12) To go to the grave, a body was washed and prepared, anointed with perfumes and spices. Jesus knew where His body was going next. The aroma of anointing would have lingered in his hair. When He was betrayed and arrested by Roman guards, He could still smell it. When His face was spit on and punched, the smell was still there. When His clothes were torn from Him and He was tied to a post to be whipped, and the blood pooled at His feet and the smell was strong, the perfume was still there. Even as He hung on the cross, an innocent man of pure love nailed to a cross, like a holy lamb sacrificed to cover the sins of others, even then—drenched in sweat, covered in blood, drawing His last breath—there was another aroma. Just a hint of lingering perfume...the fragrance of love. A king is anointed to rule; Jesus was anointed to die. Not a waste. It was a beautiful thing.

Does our worship please God? I hope so. I know it does. Psalm 141:2 says, “May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.” (Psalm 141:2) The picture of heaven in Revelation includes, “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people” offered around the throne of God. (Revelation 5:8) Does your worship matter to God? He receives it like the fragrance of love. First things first. My Lord deserves to be first on my calendar. I’m cracking open my most precious commodity. I’m pouring it out for the Lord. Jesus deserves by best first.

STUDY GUIDE FIRST THINGS FIRST - CALENDAR Matthew 26:1-13

Start It

- Charles Schwab once visited a business consultant on the recommendation of John D. Rockefeller. Schwab was frustrated with not being able to accomplish as much as he wished he could each day. The consultant gave him some simple advice. Write down the six most important things to do today. At the end of the day, whatever didn’t get done goes on the top of the list for tomorrow and add new items to make six. Then the consultant said, “Don’t pay me now. Do this for thirty days and send me a check for what you think it was worth.” After thirty days, Schwab sent him a check for \$25,000. There is great power to having priorities aligned on your calendar. Doing first things first orders everything else and ensures you get the most out of the day. God is first. Put God first on your calendar.

Study It

- Read Matthew 26:6-13. Where is Jesus when this occurs? What story can you imagine that would bring Jesus and His followers to this house at this time?
- Read Mark 14:1-9 where this story is told with greater detail. What might have motivated this woman to break her most prized possession and pour its contents out on Jesus?
- What upset the disciples about this act? Was it a genuine concern for the poor? What else might be getting under their skin?
- Why does Jesus say this act was important and proper? What will the legacy be for this woman?
- If our most prized possession is our time, what does it mean to give God our most prized possession? Was this event an act of worship? How important is worship to God and to us?

Pray It

Heavenly Father, every gift we hold and every asset we retain comes from Your loving hand. You have given us the precious resource of time. Every one of us has it and spends it at the same rate. Pour such love for You into our hearts that it is easy to pour out our time before You and for Your glory. Meet us in the morning; meet us on the first day in weekly worship; meet us on our calendars as we pour out the time we have to love and serve You and to love and serve our neighbors by Your impulse. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Live It

Open your calendar and block out the time you want to spend with and for God. For those with digital calendars...hit repeat.