

*Babette's Feast* is a movie about Babette, who was one of the most talented chefs in all of Paris. One day authorities kick Babette out of Paris so she moves to a Danish fishing village whose small religious community is full of hardhearted people. The community is marked by one word—get. Get ahead. Get back. Get even. And whatever you do—get revenge. The community takes Babette in and she serves as their maid and cook. They only want her to serve bland food because that's all they know. That's what happens when people are driven by the word get. Life is bland, very bland!

One day another word broadsides the community. Babette wins a lottery in Paris and so she cooks a feast. She treats the religious community to a meal of rare delicacies, excellent wine and some of the best gourmet food in the world.

And the community is restored. Arguments are dropped. Past sins are forgiven. And when the evening is finished, they join hands under the stars and sing the Doxology.

Babette replaces get with what word? Give. Babette gives freely, Babette gives extravagantly and Babette gives joyfully.

Later, though, the community discovers what Babette had really done. She had spent all of her lottery money on the feast—not just a portion of it, as they had thought. In doing so Babette closes the door to her future. She can never return to Paris and never take up a post as a chef at one of the world's leading restaurants. And why is that? Babette gave it all!

We continue our sermon series called Places of the Passion. Today we walk with Jesus to Bethany. In Bethany we meet Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. In a way, Mary is the Babette of the Bible!

Here's the Context. "Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper ... (Matthew 26:6) Bethany is just a mile east of Jerusalem, on the Mt. of Olives. The Jewish Passover is about to begin and Jesus is in Bethany. Why Bethany?

Because there were no empty hotel rooms in Jerusalem. Jerusalem's population at the time of Christ was about 30,000. During Passover, it

would balloon to roughly 180,000 people. The city's population would increase six-fold! This is why Jesus stayed in Bethany—on the outskirts of Jerusalem—during Passover week.

Who is in Bethany? Simon the Leper—his home is where these events take place. Simon had been healed of leprosy. Someone with active leprosy would not have had a lot of people show up at his home for dinner! Jesus is there in Simon's home and so are his disciples. So is Mary! Normally women didn't join men in public events like this. That's a shock at the start. Mary is there—the Babette of the Bible—ready to teach us about one of the greatest words in the world. Give!

That's the context. Here's the cost. "A woman—John 12:3 tells us that the woman is Mary— came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table." (Matthew 26:7) How much did the perfume cost? We're told in John 12:5 that it's worth a year's income. Woah! A year's income! The average American makes \$46,000 a year! Imagine dropping \$46,000 just like that? As everyone in the room watches, Mary does two remarkable things. First, she pours out very expensive perfume with total abandon. It's the most valuable thing Mary has, but she will not keep it. She will not worship it. She opens it and empties it out to the very last drop. Second, Mary pours it on Jesus' head. The only people in the Old Testament whose heads were regularly anointed were who? Kings!

Do you understand? Jesus is a king. No, Jesus is **the** King! That's the main message of Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 2:2 calls him the "King of the Jews." Matthew 21:5 refers to Jesus with these words, "See your King comes to you." Matthew 27:37 records the sign above the Savior's head while he dies on a cross, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Because Jesus is the King, Mary replaces get with give.

The context? Bethany during Passover Week. The cost? Everything. The comparison? It's between Mary and the disciples. Mary is extravagant. Mary is excessive. Mary goes way over the top. And the disciples? "When the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.'" (Matthew 26:8–9) The disciples are threatened. Their entire world

comes crashing down. The disciples were angry. Mad! Upset! All because Mary lives by one word—give.

The comparison couldn't be more black and white. Mary is generous. The disciples are greedy. Mary gives with abandon. The disciples are miserly to a tee. Mary sacrifices financially. The disciples won't give a nickel. Mary shows her faith with actions. The disciples talk a good game—"giving money to the poor"—but we know they don't mean it. Mary loves the word give. But all the disciples can do is get. Get more. Get ahead. And get out on top.

The Cross. "But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.'" (Matthew 26:10, 12) Beautiful? The cross? Yes! Mary knew about these verses in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 1:21, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 26:28, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." "In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial." "Burial."

Burial, of course, implies death. And what a death it would be! Betrayed by Judas. Denied by Peter. Sentenced by Pilate. Scourged by soldiers. Mocked by the crowds. Abandoned by His Father. Christ's death pays for all sin, for all people, for all time. All sin. All people. All time. Mary gives Jesus everything she has. Mary prepares Jesus to give everything He has. And the room is filled with the smell of costly perfume!

Smells are powerful, aren't they? The smell of a rose catches your nose. Suddenly, it's like you're taken to the backyard of your childhood home. Or maybe it's the scent of your grandmother's perfume, and memories of your grandmother come flooding back. While words go to the thinking part of our brain, smells go to the emotional part of our brain. That's why a whiff of grandma's perfume brings back our emotions for grandma. Smells can stir in us some very powerful emotions.

That's also true for Jesus. Mary's strong perfume lingers with Jesus throughout Holy Week—as He makes His way to the cross, marking Him with one word—give.

Matthew 26:13 states, “Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Why is that? Because the kingdom of God isn't about hoarding and stockpiling. The kingdom of God isn't about being chintzy and cheap. The kingdom of God isn't about get. Get will kill us. Always and forevermore God's kingdom is about one word—give.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus—Mary, the Babette of the Bible—Mary shows us that the kingdom of God is about giving lavishly, giving generously, giving joyfully and giving completely. “Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Jesus never says this about anyone else!

Thanks to Mary, we can boil life down to one simple word; one word with one syllable; one powerful and life-changing word. Try it out. It will change everything. It will create so much joy. The word? You know. It's the most powerful word on the planet. G-I-V-E. Give. Amen.