

Mark 14:1-26

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 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, 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, 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 is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹² On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." ¹⁶ So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷ When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him

one after another, "Surely, not I?" ²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

²² While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴ He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

²⁶ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." ²⁹ Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." ³⁰ Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." ³¹ But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

Mischa Caldwell, 41

Jamie Lee Wounded Arrow, 28

Jojo Striker, 23

Tiara Richmond, 24

Ciara McElveen, 26

Chyna Gibson aka Chyna Doll Dupree, 31

Jaquarrius Holland, 18

These are the 7 transgender women we have lost this year.

Today is the 77th day of 2017. And we have lost these 7.

They died of unnatural causes.

They were killed, sentenced to death by anti-trans legislation, anti-trans attitudes, anti-trans violence.

I am saying their names this morning because even though this past week, organizations around the country rallied in a National Day of Action to End Violence Against Transgender Women, particularly trans women of color, you wouldn't have known it.

Other narratives took priority.

Narratives about alleged phone wiretaps. Narratives about what a couple pages of a 12-year-old tax return might reveal. Narratives about presidential refusal to shake hands on camera.

Nobody remembered the 7 women.

So I will say each of their names.

Mischa Caldwell, 41

Jamie Lee Wounded Arrow, 28

Jojo Striker, 23

Tiara Richmond, 24

Ciara McElveen, 26

Chyna Gibson aka Chyna Doll Dupree, 31

Jaquarrius Holland, 18

Our collective bankruptcy of memory is as dangerous as it is baffling. Perhaps if we remembered the dozens of trans women of color who were killed in 2016, we'd have more vigilance, more concern, more compassion, in 2017.

Some folks blame the media – they say the media tells us what we should remember, what we should care most about. Some folks say it's just too hard, too sad, to think about so much death. Let me veg out on Netflix and fluff pieces, they say.

I was curious about this, y'all. So I did what I do when I get curious. I Googled.

I discovered that neuroscientist have come up with a way to talk about memories that, to me, explains how our brains priorities handshakes over homicides.

Apparently, we have HOT memory. Say hot memory.

And we have COLD memory. Say cold memory.

Hot memory is the process by which we create and maintain memories that are emotionally charged.

You know how that certain song comes on and it reminds you of your favorite relative, or your childhood sweetheart, or your first good kiss?

Yeah. That song.

Think about how you feel when that song comes on. Do you feel good?

The song makes you think of the person or that event. And you feel good when you think of these things. Your brain has made an association between the memory of that person or that event, and the emotion you feel about that person or that event. So now when you're stimulated by the song, you feel the emotion.

HOT memory.

It has been theorized that hot memory is the basis of emotionality, including our fears and our passions. Just as we can link memory to happiness, we can link memory to trauma and terror.

Cold memory is the process by which we create and maintain memories that are not emotionally charged. This memory system is located in the central and frontal regions of the brain. This is how you call up where you put your keys and the route you drive to work.

Now. Here's what is fascinating. People who are living with illnesses that compromise memory systems, like Alzheimer's, first lose capacity in their cold memory systems.

What did I do with my keys?

Where did I park my car?

And as the disease progresses, the hot memory system falters too.

It's why my Grandma, at the end of her life, could recognize me – I could tell by the way her eyes warmed when she saw me – but she couldn't quite remember the city I lived in or the last time I visited.

The emotional memory of her first-born, namesake grandchild was in tact. She loved me.

The other stuff? Those colder memories teased her, showing up one day and walking out the next.

I want to suggest this morning that maybe the reason we focused more on what Chimamanda Adichie declared about the woman-ness of trans women instead of the life-threatening realities trans women face every day is that, spiritually, theologically, we have a hot memory problem.

Today's sermon text, about a woman who anoints Jesus, is found in some form in all 4 gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – many times before.

I've even sung Cece Winans' song, "Alabaster Box," in worship at the Lancaster Seminary chapel. The lyrics to the song sorta mashes together the version of the story in Mark and Luke – the woman anoints Jesus with both her tears AND the costly oil she brings with her in an alabaster jar.

But, year after year, as we come back to this same journey to Good Friday, to Easter Sunday morning, other narratives take over.

This passage starts with suspense. The priests and the scribes were plotting to kill Jesus.

We know what's coming next. Judas' name is on the tips of our tongues. We shake our heads, again, at his greed, his betrayal.

This passage ends with the Lord's Supper. We scoff at the account of the disciples' denial of their future denial. We laugh at them, each asking, is it me, Jesus? Am I the one who will sell you out?

Tucked in between the suspense and the Eucharist is this story of a woman whose name didn't even make it into the text, but whose story is inextricably linked to the gospel story, to Jesus' story.

This woman is uninvited to this gathering with Jesus. The party wasn't created for her. She crosses the well-defined borders of her social world to enter – not to spectate, not to hold up the wall, but to interrupt and intervene. Her presence is a transgression.

And the disciples respond to her like she's a disruption. She disrupts how they were thinking about women, about how women should relate to them, to Jesus. She stops time. She creates space for herself.

But not only that. She brings her unbound offering of anointing to Jesus. She pours out her oil and indeed pours out herself. It is clear she understands something that even the disciples, after 3 years of walking with Jesus, don't seem to understand.

Jesus is about to die.

There is no time to dawdle.

There is no time to be modest and respectable.

The text says she breaks the bottle to anoint Jesus. I imagined she hurried. She didn't know how long she had. She didn't know if the men who were acting as Jesus' bodyguards would intervene and kick her out. She didn't know.

But she knew she had to do it.

Maybe she lived in the liminal space between life and death. Maybe she understood what it imminent death felt like. Perhaps she had a checkered past that haunted her. Maybe she was used to being dismissed and ignored. Maybe she had been excluded from worship, from ritual.

And maybe somebody had laid hands on her, had anointed her, spoken blessings over her. So perhaps she made sure to get the same fancy oil that somebody used on her. She knew Jesus' situation. She knew some of what Jesus needed.

She planned the ritual on the way there. The little prayer, the little blessing, that she would say over Jesus.

She was unbound and unashamed.

She spent her best, maybe her last, to spend time with the teacher who would not judge her, who would let her be all of herself.

The disciples could not hide their disgust. She was already an undesirable. Not on the guest list. Who IS she? Who does she THINK she is?

They wanted to blot her presence out of their minds. They wanted to preserve their closed circle with Jesus, in his last hours before his death.

This woman is doing too much. Too much. Too much.

But not only that. This woman's presence alerted the disciples to their own envy of her. How could she know that he was going to die, when they didn't quite believe it yet themselves?

They felt some guilt and shame. Why didn't WE think to do that?

They find a way to project their shame back onto the woman.

She's poor. How dare she be using an iPhone, I mean, expensive oil?

And then Jesus, like Jesus does, tells them what really matters.

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

This woman pours into Jesus and Jesus is blessed by her offering.

He weaves together his story with hers.

Her prophetic act connects to his prophetic life.

But the tragedy is that we do not say her name when we proclaim the good news.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus presides over the bread and the wine at Table with his friends, and did you notice – he never says those beloved words: do this in remembrance of me.

Now you can make the case that Mark is after all the shortest gospel and consistently lops off parts of the familiar story.

But I wanna suggest that Jesus had already given the disciples a clue about how and what to remember.

He said, remember this woman when you share the good news.

Say her name.

But saying her name would require us to be emotionally connected to her. Connected to her boldness, her vulnerability.

Her "undesirable" status.

We'd have to feel the sting of her pain – the pain that wouldn't let her go. The pain that brought her all the way to Jesus.

We'd have to feel the weight of her sacrifice – the cost of her anointing.

We'd have to feel the hostility of those who told her she wasn't supposed to be there, that she oughta be ashamed, that she oughta be arrested.

I wonder what would happen if every time we came to this Table, to remember Jesus, we also remembered this woman? Not with our cold memory system.

What if we associated our deepest passion and our strongest emotions with this woman, so that we never forget her.

Because we can't preach the gospel without saying her name.

I'm going to give her a name.

Mischa Caldwell, 41

Jamie Lee Wounded Arrow, 28

Jojo Striker, 23

Tiara Richmond, 24

Ciara McElveen, 26

Chyna Gibson aka Chyna Doll Dupree, 31

Jaquarrius Holland, 18

These women. Trans women. Poor trans women whose average annual income is \$11,000. Who paid the ultimate cost for daring to come out of the shadows, to anoint themselves and their friends and family with the oil of their lives.

Say her name.

Say her name.

Say her name.

In her name is good news.

In her story is Jesus' story.