

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the anointed one,
Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

“What’s that fragrance in the air? Is that Christian we smell?” Find yourself desperately in need of the latest accessories for the Christian lifestyle? Want to give a gift that says Christian? Consider all the newest and greatest Christian-y merchandise tendered at the Olde Lutheran webstore. Or maybe wandering into the local Christian bookstore and checking out some of the current Christian lifestyle accessories is more your style. I’ve discovered they even have Christian sections in the gift aisles in regular retail stores like Walmart.

I was bummed out when I discovered Old Lutheran.com no longer carries Testamints or Confirmints. These were mints that came in a nice tin. They not only kept your breath smelling great, they made great gifts too. I’m always get a smile when I see Veggie Tales merchandise. Veggie Tales merch is still in high demand. From jewelry to tee shirts and from Christian sayings on tote bags to baseball caps and bumperstickers, we Christians like to spend money on Christian merch. It’s pretty hard to nail down a specific number, but as near as I can figure the total for all Christian merchandise sold in the US is over \$100 Billion.

It’s almost endless the Christian stuff you can buy... For example, do you play golf? Consider Gospel Golf Balls. What better conversation starter at the 1st

tee than a portion of Scripture emblazoned across your golf ball. You no longer need to be frustrated when losing a sliced ball into the rough, because who knows what pagan unbeliever may find your ball later on. If you play like me and your shots go from one side of the rough to the other and you lose half a dozen balls every time you play, well don't worry ... lose a golf ball, share the gospel. My son has even gotten in on the whole Christian apparel craze. One of his favorite tee shirts has a picture of Jesus and the words "Come at me Bro".

It's hard to turn away from the display of Jesus Junk. It's like the accident on the side of the freeway; you don't want to look as you drive by ... and yet you can't help looking. By the way, most of this stuff is produced by Chinese children working in sweat shop factories miles away from their homes. The children are ripped from their families and may only get to see their moms and dads once a month, only if they produce enough Jesus Junk... Please consider that the next time you think about purchasing a "Made in China" Christian trinket...

And here's the coop de grass! This is not just a punch line for a sermon illustration. This is real. You can actually buy Virtuous Woman perfume. It comes packaged with a passage from Proverbs 31, "Virtuous Woman ... her worth is far above rubies." Its Web site claims it's "a fragrance experience that engages body, mind and spirit." It's "designed to promote and express spirituality," and its makers claim wearers will be "honored for exemplifying the image of a Virtuous

Woman.” I get how a perfume can be alluring and even sensual, but how does a fragrance engage one’s spirit? How can one’s perfume express spirituality? Does a soul stink at the end of a particularly hard work out of prayer like I do after my workout at the gym? Can “Virtuous Woman” make this soul-stink somehow more dainty and becoming? What makes a perfume spiritual — is it made from holy water? These are important questions for would-be accessorizing Christians. The seller of this stuff claims the floral fragrance is distinctly Christian and can be an evangelistic tool. They claim it’s enticing enough to provoke the question: ‘What’s that you’re wearing?’ Then you take the opportunity to speak of your faith. They’ve opened the door, and now you can share Jesus, all because of the smell of your perfume...

There’s no reason to doubt this company’s sincerity, but aren’t there already well-known perfumes a woman can wear to bait and switch a conversation from fragrance to faith? I can think of a couple... “That smells lovely — what are you wearing?” “It’s Obsession by Calvin Klein — but I’m really obsessed with Jesus.” Or, “It’s Eternity — do you know where you are going when you die?” Or, “It’s Romance by Ralph Lauren — because God so loved the world ...”

Okay — maybe Christian merchandising has gone a little too far, but ironically, this concept of a Christian fragrance is quite biblical. In Paul’s second letter to his Church in Corinth he told the church “For we are the aroma of Christ

to God...” (2 Corinthians 2:15). Granted, it took some time to get to my point this week, but the “Christian” aroma industry does link to our text. This week’s Gospel gives us a tangible picture of what being Christ’s aroma might look like through the example of Jesus and the scent very expensive perfume that was lavished on His feet in an extravagant act of worship.

Mary demonstrates lavish worship by anointing Jesus’ feet with perfume worth about \$60,000 in today’s dollars. I can imagine the smell overwhelming the entire house and even outside the doors of the place... The smell of the anointed Christ must have been one of the most beautiful aromas to ever grace the air. With that much expensive perfume, I’m sure you could quite literally smell Christ a block away. The thing is, even before this smelly event people could sniff Jesus out in the crowd. The aroma of his actions attracted people from all over the region. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and had even just raised Lazarus from the dead. This very dinner party might have been the celebration of that prior event. Talk about irony. Jesus brought Lazarus back to life even over the objections of some in the crowd that he had been dead four days already and would be stinking to high heaven! Maybe Mary should have saved a little bit of that Nard for Laz... Getting back to my point, everything Jesus said and did had a certain aroma about it, which begs the question for us today; in what ways are we being the aroma of Christ and where do things stink a bit?

We learn from Christ's example and should ask ourselves the question, do those around us know there is something different about us? Does our life make them curious as to what, or Who, lurks in our distinctive uniqueness? Do they inquire about that difference? Isn't it God's plan for our coworkers and neighbors to be able to easily pick us out of a crowd and recognize we're followers of Jesus? Do our lifestyles and daily actions display God's plan? Can those around you smell the smell of Christ on you? And I'm not talking about just wearing a good Jesus or even really great Martin Luther paraphernalia...

I don't ask these questions to set anyone off on a guilt trip. Once in a while it's good to do a gut check in order to make sure we're still on the pathway God would have us travel. So, here's what I smell around here... I smell the scent of Jesus all around this place. When I hear stories about someone doing an act of kindness for another, I smell the scent of Jesus. When I see quilts being lovingly sewn for the poor and for refugees, I smell the scent of Jesus. When I see how some of you love your jobs and give your all to do the best you know how, *and* you confess you do it for God, I smell the scent of Jesus. When I hear about your passion for art or for taking care of lost or abandoned animals, when I think about the one who teaches women who are incarcerated, or all those who help at the FISH pantry or the Grace Resurrection Soup kitchen, I smell the scent of Jesus. When I look out from the front of this sanctuary and see all of your faces, week

after week, even when you don't feel like being here, guess what, I smell the scent of Jesus.

In my adult years I've traveled from Arizona to Virginia, to Texas, to Alaska, and back to Ohio and in all those places I detected some mild aroma of Jesus, but here in this place it's like being in the house when Mary poured a entire pound extremely expensive Nard perfume on Jesus. I thank God every day for this Congregation and for all the beautiful acts of Christian kindness that come from this place.

We don't have to buy Christian trinkets, wear Christian jewelry, or Christian tee shirts to be like Jesus. Our actions of love for the neighbor give off the best smelling scent in the world. It's the scent of love. May our scent continue to reach every part of our community until everyone knows we are Christ's, because we not only do the things Christ did, but we even smell like him too. May our acts of worship, our acts of prayer, and our acts of kindness and charity be like sweet incense rising to God. May you be blessed in sharing the sweet perfume of Christ everywhere you go, amen.