

Holy Week Reflection - Monday, 29th March 2021

John 12:1-8 Jesus anointed at Bethany

Good morning, and welcome to the first of our two Holy Week Reflections.

Today's bible reading comes from John 12:1-8:

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Reflection

Jesus's "time" is fast approaching - it's less than a week before the beginning of the Passover celebrations and the chief priests are closing in on Jesus: his time to be handed over to the religious authorities to be tried and executed.

And here is Jesus reclining at the table, sharing a meal in the comfort of the home of his close friends, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. What a precious time this must have been for him.

Anointing a guest was not an uncommon practice, but it was the manner in which the anointing of Jesus took place, that caused a stir that day.

Mary takes half a litre of pure nard and pours it on Jesus's feet.

Nard was a luxury imported from India, and as Judas Iscariot tells us, this amount would have been worth a year's wages! Compare that with an annual salary today! Mary must have saved for this for years; it would have been her most valuable possession. An *appropriate* use of it would have been to anoint Jesus with a few drops. Instead she pours the whole lot over his feet! Pure extravagance, and at what enormous cost!

Judas is indignant: "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." We're told that he was only saying this because he was in the habit of stealing money from the money bag.

But whatever his motives, I wonder, perhaps, whether we might also have raised our eyebrows at Mary's *over-the-top* act of devotion? After all, Jesus had been preaching about the poor and needy and in doing so had been confirming all that God had said, over the centuries, to his people about love for the poor and vulnerable. And here was Mary apparently throwing away a golden opportunity to make a real difference.

"Leave her alone!" Jesus says, "You will always have the poor and needy among you, but you will not always have me."

Jesus doesn't try to stop Mary. He receives the anointing as a gift, even allowing her to wipe and caress his oiled feet with her hair. It's a truly intimate moment in Jesus' life. He had given and given, he had ministered to the poor and needy, and here at the end of his life was someone coming to him, not to ask of him or even to be useful, but whose heart was simply to bless him, to minister to him in *his* time of growing vulnerability: pouring out her perfume was an extravagant act of love and gratitude which brought Jesus joy.

In pouring out her perfume, Mary was giving all she had to Jesus. There was nothing moderate or measured about her act of anointing - but then, there was nothing moderate or measured about the love that led Christ to the cross. And in some way, Mary was anticipating this, sensing perhaps that she wasn't going to have Jesus with her for much longer, and anointing him in advance of his burial.

Mary's extravagant act of worship and devotion reminds us that no amount of love for Jesus Christ, no expression of true, deep, heart-felt worship can ever be a waste. You cannot over-worship Jesus. Our faith is first and foremost about love and worship of a Person and out of that devotion flows our deeds in the service of others.

As we think for a moment about the time we spend with the Lord, we may want to reflect a little about how we offer ourselves in worship and devotion to Jesus. How do I relate to this extravagant giving of Mary for her Lord? It's so easy to come to Jesus wanting or needing something from him. What might it look like for me to become less measured and more generous, more extravagant towards him? I wonder what it might look like for you this week to be extravagant in your worship and devotion of Jesus?

Mary did what she did, because she loved and treasured her Lord. She did what she did out of sheer devotion for Christ. She knew that he was worthy of extravagant love. As we prepare to remember the costliest and most sacrificial love of our Lord over this coming week, may we be renewed in our love for him and our desire to give what we have, to him.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we remember Mary's beautiful act of devotion and the way in which she ministered to you in your time of need. As we reflect this week on the way in which you poured out your life and love for us in the shedding of your blood on the cross, stir our hearts to pour out our worship and devotion to you, that we might bring joy to your heart. Amen.