

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Year C
RCL

- [Isaiah 43:16-21](#)
- [Philippians 3:4b-14](#)
- [John 12:1-8](#)
- [Psalm 126](#)

The table is set before us, as is so often the case with Jesus. It feels like a classic Mary and Martha scenario. Martha, serving. Mary, at Jesus' feet. But if we head down that path, we miss what John's Gospel has to offer us. John's Gospel, is defined by two parts: the book of signs and the book of glory. We're in neither as we hear this passage today- it's a threshold moment that we must cross to the Book of Glory. Jesus had plenty of meals with plenty of people, sinners, the outcasts, the oppressed, his disciples and friends. Too many meals in the eyes of those against him. But this dinner was a special occasion. For those gathered around the table weren't just siblings, they were also witness to the impetus for the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus- The raising of Lazarus from the Dead. We not only have Mary, and Martha, and Judas, but Lazarus, recently dead but raised up. And Jesus, alive and well, but soon to be dead.

Scholar Ray Brown would say that Resuscitation restores ordinary life; resurrection leads to eternal life. (349 Brown) If you think about it in those terms, Lazarus returned to ordinary life as he knew it. The raising of Lazarus was different than anything they

experienced before, but those that believed in Jesus as the Messiah might get the inkling through Jesus' words and actions that more was to be done. Jesus' ultimate sacrifice would be coming, and soon.

Mary seemed to know this. Did she know fully what it meant? We cannot know for sure. But she saw the signs and believed. At some point in the dinner Mary took expensive perfume and she uncovered her head. Pouring the perfume on Jesus' feet, she dried them with her loose hair. Judas, speaking out in protest, not necessarily against the actions, but about the exorbitant cost. Jesus, ignoring that and once again clueing them all in that there was more to this action than meets the eye.

This dinner is problematic in many ways. A woman, uncovering her head, intimately touching a guest's feet. She used very expensive oil. Judas calling out that this use was a total and absolute waste of money. Jesus, reaffirming that what he's been saying all along, that instead of thinking in those terms, they could think about that he soon would face his death, would truly be happening. The time draws nigh for him.

Judas, the common enemy here, wasn't exactly wrong. He wasn't exactly right either. It is very likely that regardless of the extremely bad choices Judas made, both in this moment and soon to come, that he did believe as a Jewish man that the Messiah would come. He believed in that mission. The mission the Messiah he was following, Jesus, stressed time and time again, that as disciples, you must look to the poor among you.

He would have heard Jesus say that. In principle, he was right; but his intentions as told to us by the text weren't so right. His actions drew me to the latest Denver 'sweep' of our homeless brothers and sisters. The city's actions continue to be inhumane, the criminalization of the homeless rampant. Framing it with the idea of public health and safety, their actions don't seem to show that they understand these are people.

What Judas couldn't seem to understand at this moment is that being a believer in Jesus, meant that relationship- relationship with God and relationship with neighbor, came first and foremost. When one cares so much about a cause, it can cause them to forget about the relationship. We get so absorbed in the task at hand that we forget about the reason we started it in the first place. Judas got so wrapped up in the idea of Jesus, that he forgot about who Jesus truly was. Mary didn't forget. Her prophetic action acted out of the knowledge and love of Christ, out of understanding of who Jesus was and what he was about to do. Mary perceived rightly something that maybe the rest couldn't, the time had come to anoint Jesus for burial. The time had come to prepare, not only Jesus, but themselves as well. And Jesus honored this sacred moment, responding out of the deepest part of himself- relationship with those created in the image of God.

It was not only the sweet smell of anointing that filled the house, but the principle of love and relationship with the Living God that filled the house. There would be lots of

things for folks who were at the dinner to talk about as they left. But the fragrance and what came of it would certainly be among the top. Maybe the next day, they woke up, still smelling the nard, taking them back to the extraordinary moment the night before. Being a witness to this moment changed them as well.

Because even though the fragrance is covering up the stench of his impending death, it more so lifts up the aroma of life- eternal life, which can only come through death of self and resurrection. Mary, and all who were there received this blessing. A colleague creatively wrote, Mary herself, like the kings of old, inadvertently receiving her own anointing on her head. Paul in 2 Corinthians would write it this way, "Through us, God brings knowledge of Christ Jesus, the Messiah. Everywhere we go, people breathe in the exquisite fragrance. Because of Christ, we give off a sweet scent rising to God, which is recognized by those on the way of salvation—an aroma redolent with life."

Herein is where the hope lies. Jesus does the same for each and every one of us. In Jesus, God brought about a new thing. Like Mary's use of the perfume, God's love for us is utterly wasteful. It's not about being right or having all the right answers- it's all about relationship. Relationship with the living word of God. We can't lose site of the preciousness of that relationship. In that relationship we see God's wild love for us, and we can be inspired to take that same wild, unyielding love to each relationship we

participate in. How does your life and your relationships give off an aroma redolent with life- redolent with Jesus?