

Reflection for the fifth Sunday of Lent, Passion Sunday. John 12:1-8

Jesus and His followers are with Lazarus, Mary and Martha at Bethany, which is near to Jerusalem. Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem as He has planned. As they gather to eat, we are witness to a very surprising event. Mary takes a jar of costly perfume and pours it over Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. Mary would have had to let down her hair to do this, so she creates a double shock letting down her hair, which could equate to present day hitching up of her skirt to indecent levels and the use of this very costly perfume. We can picture the sharp intake of breath from all around. The shock, the amazement that such a thing could happen. It is Judas who explodes, 'Why was this perfume not sold, and the money given to the poor?'

Mary's action is one of extreme devotion to Jesus. Was she aware of this anointing of Jesus' feet foretells the anointing before burial? Is this an unconscious sign saying far more than she realises? Her act of love is a prophetic statement about the fact that before too long Jesus is to be in a tomb, put there hastily without the time for proper anointing. Perhaps those around were embarrassed by this emotional outpouring by Mary, we do not always cope with the public emotions of others. We can imagine them all looking away as Mary lets down her hair in public. They would have been embarrassed at the use of this expensive perfume. It is Judas the treasurer who loudly questions the cost of it all. The role of those in charge of a common purse is to carefully consider any expenditure. It is suggested that Judas may have been dipping his hand into the money bag. By the time this gospel was written the part of Judas as betrayer of Jesus was well known. His name has become synonymous with betrayal but was he a thief also? We do not know.

It is interesting to consider how we might have reacted in the circumstances. Would we have been covered in embarrassment at the overtly emotional outburst, this extravagant use of expensive perfume? Which would give us the most difficulty, the cost, or the public show of emotion? There is no escaping the challenge that this reading poses for us. Which side would we take? Are we with Mary's emotional but generous outpouring of love for Jesus or the parsimony of Judas? How much does our attitude to this reflect in our lives? Are we generous in sharing our feelings, good at sharing the love we receive, or do we carefully count the cost? Are we ready to share the love and generosity of God with others?

Heavenly Father

We come before you today reflecting on Mary's act of love and devotion in anointing Jesus.

May we, like her, be moved to express our gratitude and love for you in tangible ways not just with words, but with our actions and our whole being.

Help us to recognise the preciousness of your presence in our lives and to honour you with our time, talents and resources, just as Mary honoured Jesus.

May our lives be a testament to the power of your unwavering love.

Amen

