



LENT BIBLE STUDY - 2022 ENTERING THE PASSION OF JESUS

#4

THE FIRST DINNER – RISKING REJECTION

GATHERING FOR THE “FIRST SUPPER”

Mark 14:3-9, Matthew 26:6-13, John 12:1-8

The “first” supper, according to John, takes place at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. In Mark it is set at the home of Simon, the one who had suffered from leprosy. John says that Mary anointed Jesus’ feet. Mark describes an unknown woman who anoints Jesus’ head (in whose memory this story is told).

John recounts that it was Judas who complained of the excess, not because he was poor, but because he wanted the money for himself. In Matthew the disciples complain, and in Luke, Simon the Pharisee is upset because she has a reputation as a sinner.

In each case a single woman, who is different from the more privileged people, displays an extravagant gift. In each case she is silent, and in in each case Jesus honours her action.

We should note that there are different types of anointing depending on the function. The word ‘Christ’, for example, derives from the Greek word *christos*, which means the ‘anointed one’. However, the word *christos* does not appear here.

In this case the word used by Jesus is *myrizo* – which means to have myrrh put on one’s body. The woman’s focus is the human body of Jesus – for burial. The scene, though, is very rich, as anointing Jesus’ head, and not his feet, is what one would do for a king.

Do you think she knew that is what she was doing?

THE WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS

These women include: Anna in the Temple, Mary Magdalene, the mother of James, Joanna and Susanna, Mary and Martha, the daughters of Jerusalem who weep, the various women that Jesus heals and others – each has their own story to tell.

We learn that some are homeowners (Luke 10:38). In Acts 12:12 a house church exists in the home of Mary, mother of John Mark. There is no reason to automatically assume these women earned their living immorally – they could have been given gifts by family members, earned money through textile work, pottery, healing, cooking, cleaning, and even investing. Several served as patrons for Jesus’ followers (Luke 8:2-3). They were also able to travel freely.

So, those who followed Jesus did not do so because of a repressive Jewish system that devalued them. They followed because Jesus spoke to their hearts and healed them – it may even be because he provided a family for those not connected to fathers or husbands.

When we tell the story of Jesus’ passion, he tells us to remember the story of this unnamed woman – a story that should inspire and encourage us.

THE WOMAN – OR WOMEN – WHO ANOINT

Matthew and Mark basically tell the same story of the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus’ head. John names the woman as Mary, the sister of Martha who anoints Jesus’ feet.

In Luke (7:36-50) the event takes place at the home of Simon the Pharisee – the one anointing is not doing so for his burial, but is honouring him and expressing her gratitude. This provides Jesus with an opportunity to talk about forgiveness. A very different story to the above.

Mark says that the woman was not a guest – she just entered the gathering – risky! The risk is accentuated as she brings with her a vial containing very costly nard. People complain as she pours it over

Jesus' head. Some say it should have been sold to help the poor – they condemn her.

Who are we to judge such actions of grace and generosity?

In defending her, Jesus alludes to Deuteronomy 15:11, saying that the poor will always be with us. The point is not to ignore the poor, but that we will always have the opportunity to help others – as God's people we are always to do that – caring for those whom God loves.

Incidentally, there are those in the church, who will misrepresent 2 Thessalonians 3:10 as a reason not to help the poor. The passage is not about the poor being lazy, refusing to work, etc. Rather it is referring to the followers of Jesus who have stopped doing regular work because they are convinced, through a further misunderstanding of Paul's teaching, that they do not have to work because Jesus is returning very soon.

This scene in Mark, is about people on this occasion supporting Jesus. It is not wrong to give our resources generously, even if others may consider it wasteful – they can help those in need or suffering.

We know practically nothing about the woman who anoints Jesus – she could have spent her last denarii on this nard, or she may have had several more vials at home. If she knew she was anointing Jesus for burial, as Jesus interpreted her action, then she knew he was going to die – something the disciples had yet to fully comprehend. The unnamed woman, an outsider, had understood the gospel message in a way others hadn't.

MARY TOOK A POUND OF COSTLY PERFUME

We might think of the different gospel versions of this story as variations on a theme. All variations are 'correct', yet all are 'different.'

In Matthew and Mark Jesus is anointed for burial at the beginning of his last week in Jerusalem.

In Luke a woman, referred to as a sinner anoints Jesus' feet.

In John's version it says that after Mary anointed Jesus' feet the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. This would have contrasted with the earlier experience of Lazarus being in the tomb three days (Luke 11:39). Not only are we reading words, but getting a sense of smell, taste, touch, sight, and sound – the good news impacts all our senses.

QUESTIONS

A woman anointed Jesus – who, where, when, why, and to what result?

Each time the story is told, the details change – that is okay. What story do we tell?

How do we tell the story?

What do we proclaim in memory of Jesus, and what do we proclaim 'in memory of' the risk-taking woman?

