

Sunday 3 April 2012

John 12: 1 - 8

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 There 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 half a litre 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."

This is such a bizarre scene, the men lounging around the table chatting, drinking and eating, Martha, her usual industrious self, serving them and then the Mary the sister who sat and listened to Jesus instead of helping her sister in the kitchen again does the unexpected. This time her actions seem just as out of place today as they did back then. Mary comes in with a bottle of very expensive perfume and proceeds to pour it over Jesus' feet and then, cheek and haire, she uses her hair to wipe this perfume over Jesus' feet. This rather intimate act has given Mary a bit of a reputation for centuries to come.

I can't claim to know what was going on in her mind but I don't think she was making any sort of advance by her actions. We are told very clearly this dinner was in honour of Jesus and it is linked with Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead so I'm guessing this act is one of absolute gratitude. I'm not sure what I would do if my brother was raised from the dead by Jesus but I'm pretty sure it would probably be something fairly extravagant. This pouring of the perfume is an anointing of the one who is clearly sent by God and the fact that she uses her own hair to wipe it is a sign of her humility, her servant heart. At a dinner party not too long after this one, Jesus slumps down, as a sign of servant leadership and washes his disciples feet.

Mary's is an extravagant act of love, gratitude and humility for the God who has touched her life and brought joy where there was sadness. We each have our own stories of how God has changed our sadness to joy. May you too express your gratitude to God with an extravagant act of love, gratitude and humility.

Prayer