

John 12:1-8 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them¹ with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii¹ and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it¹ so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

“Wasteful Love”

On Palm Sunday it is the custom to tell the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as Israel's Messiah or anointed king. We do this in preparation for Holy Week and Jesus death on the Cross on Good Friday where it becomes obvious that the temple authorities and rulers over Israel did not recognize him as their Messiah who would save them from their oppressors and establish the Kingdom of God. It seems odd that he would go unrecognized for he had openly manifested the Kingdom in his wanderings around Judea and Galilee and even into the surrounding nations. Everywhere he went he had openly been proclaiming, healing, exorcising, and doing miraculous feedings that revealed who he was. Even the non-Israelites in Syria and Jordan and even the demons realized that he was the Son of God; but not the powers that be in Jerusalem. They simply had too much power to lose. They simply did not get it.

All the Gospels tell the story of a woman anointing Jesus for his burial in the days following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke's version Jesus speaks highly of this woman saying that she had done a beautiful thing and that everywhere the Gospel was proclaimed what this woman had done for him in anointing his body for burial would be told also. Apparently she got it.

As Jesus said, this woman had done a beautiful thing. In the Jewish faith one could say she performed an act of Chesed, an act of loving kindness that truly reveals the love of God. The perfume she poured out on Jesus in an extravagant act of wasteful love was worth upwards of three years salary for any of us here. Yet, to Jesus it was a beautiful act that revealed the very loving kindness of God. You see, her anointing of Jesus with this perfume corresponds to God the Father's wasteful act of letting his Son's blood be shed for the forgiveness of our sin and the covering over of our sin by the wasteful act of God giving his own Holy Spirit to us so that we are reconciled to him in the friendship of being his beloved children. With the wasteful gift of his Spirit God has truly united us to the love which God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By anointing of us with the perfume of the Holy Spirit, God has made us partakers of the relationship which Jesus the Son shares with God the Father in the Holy Spirit.

Well, enough of this theology stuff. God has wasted the perfume of his very self on us. He has wasted the life giving blood of Jesus the Son on us in the gift of the Holy Spirit to us. I have said wasted. This is not a very nice thing to say of us, especially as we know that God loves us dearly, indeed loves all people dearly even the most evil of us who have ever lived. Yet, when we look at the whole condition of human existence – the wars, the poverty, the AIDS, the way we abuse one another, our pride, our self-involvement, our self-indulgence, our self-righteousness, the way we judge one another – it would make more sense for us like Judas the thief and betrayer to turn to God and say, “Why have you wasted the gift of yourself on us. Destroy us all and start again!”

Well, here is how Mary’s act is so significant, why it was a beautiful thing. Of all the disciples only she understood that he was going to die. In fact, she was the only human outside of Jesus who got it. Even though his disciples knew who he was, they wouldn’t believe him when he said he had to die. Instead, they were blinded with their own hope and belief that he would ride into Jerusalem, cleanse the temple, kick out the Romans, and establish the Kingdom and...they would rule with him. Hmmm, we’re back to that power thing again. But Mary, knowing no other way to express her overwhelming grief at knowing Jesus would die rather spontaneously takes this bottle of very fine, very expensive, very pure perfume and wastes it on Jesus’ feet. An act that simply says, “My heart is broken, but I understand that you must die.” All she could do with her grief was this futile, wasteful act of preparing his feet for burial.

Mary’s beautiful act mirrors God’s understanding and deep grief over our fallenness and the inescapable fact that we, his beloved children, must die. God is a grieving God not an angry God demanding righteousness and obedience. His children are dying. What else can he do for us other than to anoint us for our death and burial with his very self that we might live through death and be healed in resurrection? God our Father, Brother, and Constant Companion is not this sourpuss, judgmental, angry, old man of a God who demands an inordinate standard of righteousness from us that we cannot possibly live up to. God is not angry at us and wanting to destroy us if we don’t repent. God is not going to destroy us and start over! Indeed, not! He loves us each as his own dear children. Instead of destroying us God the Father in an act of wasteful love sent the Son who wasted his life as on of us and died so that they might wastefully give us their very life in the gift of the Holy Spirit that we might live through death. Praise be to God! He understands. He understands that the end result of the *skubala* of our lives is that we must die, but out of his love for us he will raise us just as he did his only begotten and beloved Son, Jesus because the same Spirit that lived in him lives also in us.

Just a closing note, in John’s Gospel, this account of Mary is located within the Lazarus story which foreshadows what is to become of us and in classic John form describes us, the church, as we are now. If you remember, Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary were dear friends of Jesus. Lazarus became ill and died. Four days after the fact, Jesus shows up and Mary lets him have it. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Mary here cries out for every human being who has ever cried out at God saying, “Where

the hell are you God? If you were here there wouldn't be this suffering and death!” Jesus wept and proceeded to the tomb where he commanded Lazarus to come forth. Next, we find Jesus a few months later in their house where they are throwing him a feast and all the faithful are gathered around.

The Lazarus story tells us of the Day of Resurrection and the feast we will share with Jesus in his Kingdom when all things have been made new. But, John here doesn't want us to let this slip by as simply being a picture of the way things will be. Rather, he is describing very well how things are with in the church, the community of believers who know the wasteful love of God because they know he has wasted it upon them by the gift of the Holy Spirit they know they have. The Lazarus story describes the many communities all over the world just like us who are a living testimony to the wasteful love of God.

Gathered around Jesus at this feast, the feast which we now share, are many people just like us just like we are gathered together today. Among them are the people like Lazarus whose healing or conversion experience has been so vivid that it is like being raised from the dead. There are the untold number of Martha's who do and do and do and do. There are the untold numbers of disciples who know Jesus yet they just silently stand by and watch what the others are doing. There are also those like Judas, thieves and betrayers whose motives are always for their own gain. There are the poor to whose aide we are called. There is Jesus, our Lord, seated confidently in our midst. Finally, there are the Mary's who most beautifully and simply love Jesus and get it and love accordingly having no better way to respond in the midst of the futility of this broken world. They waste everything they have to love as they have been loved.

So, to wrap this up, how about you; where are you in this story? As someone who knows Christ, who knows the wasteful gift of the Holy Spirit, who understands his death and understands that God understands that we must die, who understands that God grieves for us, who has the hope of Resurrection, where do you fit in here in the Kingdom? I guess a better way of asking would be, “Would your neighbours say that you are a silent disciple, a silent Martha, a thieving and betraying Judas, or a wastefully loving Mary?” Amen.