

John 12:1-8 Lent V 2010

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (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.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Next week is Palm Sunday which marks the beginning of Holy Week. Jesus is on his final journey to Jerusalem to be welcomed as a King and shortly thereafter to be crucified as an outcast.

The little story we just heard, foreshadows those events of Holy Week.
- a story of Love and betrayal.

The side of betrayal is represented by no one less than a disciple of Jesus, Judas Iscariot. Soon he will go and betray Jesus for about a tenth of the money he is talking here about. Judas is here described as a common thief. He steals money from the common purse. He hides behind the veil of caring for the poor, but his interest is centered around himself. What he sees in Mary's doing is for him just a missed opportunity to enrich himself. And in the end, after all is said and done, ...he kills himself .. because he can no longer live with himself and his deeds.

On the other side is Mary, the sister of Lazarus. She interrupts evening dinner with an unprecedented show of affection for Jesus.

Unprecedented it is what she is doing.

For a woman it was considered most shameful to let her hair down in public. Such an intimate expression of Love and affection was only permitted behind close doors but most certainly not during an evening meal with friends.

So Mary takes a perfume, which is valued at about one years worth of wages, and carefully ..tenderly anoints Jesus' feet with it. And then she dries and wipes his feet with her hair.

Can the difference be greater than between those two sides??

One side .. operating hidden .. behind the veil .. betraying Jesus

The other side stepping into the open and loving without shame ...for all the world to see.

And so Jesus gets to be anointed for his last walk to Jerusalem.
He gets anointed with all the Love and intimacy this woman could give him for his last journey to the cross!
Mary had thought the perfume for his dead body .. but what good would it have done to the dead body? She needed to live and express the love she felt for Jesus in the here and now!

And so she pours the perfume over his feet .. and gently wipes the feet with her hair .. anointing Him for his last walk.

A walk through Palm Sunday to the cross .. through shame, betrayal, torture and death.

And here is the difference between the two sides .. betrayal, shame, torture and death do end.
Love does not ... Easter will always come!

I am deeply touched by this story of Mary. It is as if she understood that Love is the only way.. the only antidote .. to the side Judas Iscariot stands for, the side of shame, betrayal, torture and death.
And so she does all she can, to be that Love, Jesus preached about.

I am glad she had the courage to love so boldly!

May we learn from her to love courageously in the face of ridicule, shame and fear because in the end, after all is said and done, we will see the Easter Light in and through Christ!