

Monday Reflection in Holy Week: Rev. Jeongsook Kim

Today's gospel reading for our reflection is
Reading: John 12: 1-8

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."

Song -- **HP 204 (verse 1 only)** by Laura Wright from You tube.

*Now the green blade rises, from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat that springs green.*

This is the first verse of hymn 204 in our hymn book and, while it is an Easter hymn and we are not yet there, its lines echo our natural surroundings in the northern hemisphere. We travel the turning of the seasons in conjunction with Holy Week, glimpsing signs of spring in the world around us, just as we receive a foretaste of the signs of Jesus' journey to the cross in our scriptures this week. In our Gospel story today, we find Jesus attending a dinner that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are giving in his honour. It seems to be a farewell dinner, a predictor, in John's Gospel, for the last supper that would occur in just a

few days. Mary is moved to anoint Jesus' feet with costly perfume and wipe them with her hair, in the same way Jesus will with the disciples' feet not long after this encounter. The house was "filled with the fragrance of the perfume"—a significant image in contrast to when the same sisters went with Jesus to Lazarus' tomb and were afraid of the stench within. Now, the house is filled not with the smell of death, but with the perfume of a costly act of love. Mary's anointing of Jesus filled the entire house with fragrance, just as our expressions of faith in and love for Jesus spread widely around our community. Her act is a sign of her true discipleship and, because she has paid attention to Jesus and the events happening around her, she is the first disciple who understands that heartbreak is coming. Mary loves Jesus deeply, without thought to cost. What do you do when someone you have journeyed with in life is going to die? Mary's answer was to love in the same way that Jesus had shown her. She exemplifies discipleship and understands it before Jesus explicitly teaches the disciples his commandment to love. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' true disciples are not just the twelve men, but any person who loves him and responds out of this love. Mary marks this time with meaning, and her ritual of pouring out the costly perfume and wiping Jesus' feet with her hair is part of her anticipatory grief. She was transformed from a woman—seen as near-worthless in her culture and society—into someone with purpose and call. The love she reveals is a testament to the relationship she had with Jesus and what it meant to her. In contrast, Judas can only sneer at what she did. In false piety, he asks why the perfume was not sold and the money given to the poor, when, in reality he wanted to skim off the top of the profits. The writer, John, explains that Judas was a thief—he would steal from the common purse and did not care for the poor. We also know that Judas ultimately betrays Jesus, and while we

hope to take after Mary, we may wonder how often we too, play Judas' part. We are faced with two very different reactions to Jesus: Mary's response of the fullness of life in discipleship and Judas' denial of that same path. Yet, the two probably feel familiar to each of us because we are comprised of both. We have a little Mary and a little Judas sitting on each shoulder, don't we? The Judas stops us from being extravagant with God's love because of arguments about practicality, which are often self-justifying, while the Mary asks us to give everything to follow Jesus—to perfume the world with love. The Judas tells you to serve yourself and not worry about how it affects others, while the Mary encourages you to love others fiercely and lavishly. Which will we choose to heed? Thomas Merton wrote, "The spiritual life is first of all a life. It is not merely something to be known and studied, it is to be lived." Thinking about life is not living. Thinking about how we would like to love Jesus is not loving. Mary got it. She was the best disciple of all—she loved Jesus and was not afraid to show the abundance of that love, even though others thought her behaviour scandalous and wasting a valuable resource. A fool, really. Kind of like Jesus, who was foolish enough to know the possible fate ahead of him and still turn his face to Jerusalem. We are all mortal beings, aren't we? How would it be if we recognized this and loved each other extravagantly? Perhaps we would be disciples, as Mary was, and live into this blessing sometimes attributed to the Franciscan order: May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace. May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. May God bless you with enough

foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world so that you can do what others claim cannot be done. May the peace of God and the God of peace be with you forevermore. Amen.

*Song – **Loved before the dawn of time** by Stuart Townend from youtube*

Chosen by my Maker,
Hidden in my Saviour:
I am His and He is mine,
Cherished for eternity.

When I'm stained with guilt and sin,
He is there to lift me,
Heal me and forgive me;
Gives me strength to stand again,
Stronger than I was before.

So with every breath that I am given
I will sing salvation's song;
And I'll join the chorus of creation
Giving praise to Christ alone.

All the chains of Satan's curse
Lifted through His offering,
Satisfied through suffering;
All the blessings He deserves
Poured on my unworthy soul.

So with every breath that I am given
I will sing salvation's song;
And I'll join the chorus of creation
Giving praise to Christ alone.

Singing glory, honour, wisdom, power
To the Lamb upon the throne.
Hallelujah, I will lift Him high.
Singing glory, honour, wisdom, power
To the Lamb upon the throne.
Hallelujah I will sing with every breath that I
am given
I will sing salvation's song;
And I'll join the chorus of creation
Giving praise to Christ alone.

Stars will fade and mountains fall;
Christ will shine forever,
Love's unfading splendour.
Earth and heaven will bow in awe,
Joining in salvation's song.