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On our way to Easter!

A woman told her neighbor, "I just got a new set of golf clubs for my husband." The other woman responded, "I'd say that was a good trade."

Thought: The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all HUMAN hearts.

-Aleksandr Solzhenits

5th Sunday of Lent 2019

John 12

At the heart of our reading is an act of anointing an expression of the most extraordinary generosity. But before considering this amazing gift to Jesus it is worth noting the way John's Gospel tells the story.

Context

As is typical of John that the story is laced with multiple suggestions that fill out the symbolic interpretation. Firstly, it is 'six days before the Passover'. The writer makes it impossible for us not to see that the cross foreshadows this event. The anointing is a preparation for death – Jesus' 'hour has come'. The anointing also expresses John's Gospel view of the cross as portraying both Jesus' death and exaltation. Anointing is part of the consecration of a King or Priest, so by this anointing Jesus is declared King and Priest. In John's telling of the trial of Jesus, the Kingship of Jesus is repeatedly referred to. Anointing is also used for healing, and as Lazarus was present at the meal, we are reminded that he was brought back to life by Jesus, and in turn this prefigures the resurrection of Jesus. This is all part of the rich symbolic backdrop to the tapestry whose central subject is Mary's gift to Jesus.

Mary's Gift and Judas' response

Mary's act of extraordinary generosity is in the context of hospitality and a shared meal. Martha and Mary have invited Jesus and his disciples for a meal. This family had a close personal relationship with Jesus. Lazarus is present as a focus for gratitude to Jesus who brought Lazarus back to life. Martha serves the meal she has prepared, her particular act of gratitude. But it is Mary's extravagance in using such costly perfume to anoint Jesus' feet that holds our attention ... and so offends Judas, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii* and the money given to the poor?' The perfume would have cost almost a year's salary for a manual worker!!

Here we have a highly charged conflict. Mary's costly generosity is targeted as being a waste, but more, it is morally wrong as it squandered the opportunity of doing good for so many needy people. Does Judas not have a point? Should we take Judas' side in this conflict?

Can we understand Jesus' response to Judas, which literally from the Greek means "Leave her alone so that she may keep it [the perfume] for the day of my burial." You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.' I am not sure, but to me it seems that this perfume may have been acquired for the body of Lazarus at the time of his death, and is now given to Jesus as an act of profound gratitude.

However, it is worth noting in passing that the response of Jesus to Judas is gentle considering the heat of the moment! 'Leave her alone...' 'Come off it, Judas!' perhaps.

However, the writer of John's gospel can't help himself and he has a go at Judas. (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.) The writer has taken sides in this conflict – whereas Jesus intervenes to calm the tension.

But how can we understand what follows when Jesus supports Mary like this: 'You always have the poor with you, but you do not

always have me'? Jesus was probably referring to a passage in Deuteronomy that condemns a grudging attitude to the care of those in need and a constant attitude of liberal generosity to the poor "since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth." (15.11). Jesus is not excusing anyone from the need to care for those in need, this should be our way of life!

The core of Judas dispute with Mary is that he felt it would have been more valuable to sell the perfume and give the money to the poor, than waste the perfume anointing Jesus for no good reason. So what value did Mary's act have. First Mary's action was prompted by gratitude and faith. I imagine it was just something Mary felt she should do. It wasn't so much thought out but knowing Jesus as she did, it felt right. It wasn't a matter of belief or head knowledge, she can't have known what was to happen to Jesus within a week, it was a matter of the heart. In the light of Jesus' death her act symbolizes central themes in John, that of Jesus' kingship through his death and exaltation. As with so many others who placed their trust in Jesus and were commended for their faith, Mary is commended for what she did.

From John's perspective Mary's anointing, the wiping of Jesus' feet with her hair, prefigured the last act of Jesus with his disciples when Jesus washed his disciples feet. Is it possible that Jesus got the idea that a way of symbolizing generous service for his disciples was to adapt what Mary had done when she anointed his feet with perfume?

If this is so, Mary's act of extravagant generosity was instrumental in forming the template of how the disciples of Jesus should love others.

What we do know is that an act of generosity has the potential of 'seeding' further acts of generous service. Here I believe we touch the heart of today's reading. Do you agree?

Response

Judas prejudices Mary's action, without fully understanding her motivation and the significance of

the act. Can you think of a time when you have fallen into that trap of jumping to incorrect conclusions in judging other people? What can be done not to succumb to this temptation?

An assumption that lies behind this story is that Jesus accepted the presence of Judas as one of his close group of disciples. Judas is accused of being a thief. Did Jesus know? Or was it enough for Jesus that Judas flawed as he was, wanted to be a disciple? His imperfections did not bar him from being one of those who were closest to Jesus throughout his ministry. What qualifies us to be called 'Christian'?

The question of a single extravagant act, or giving to the poor? Are you aware of parallels to this question today about how we personally or collectively as a Church allocate resources?

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SENIOR YOGA starts April 10 at the Richmond VFW
Classes designed for 55+
Cost: \$5
VFW Hall
34339 32 Mile Road
Richmond
Wednesday, 9:30 - 10:30 Slow Flow Yoga (a mat required)
Wednesday, 10:45 - 11:30 Chair Yoga (no floor work)

Come to the Senior Yoga class and reap the benefits of Yoga:
Increase flexibility; improve balance; increase mobility; improve

ease of breathing; increase lung capacity.

Contact Jill at 810-543-3488 or email: jillmkonwinski@gmail.com

Pastor Chuck at Christ the King Lutheran on 23 Mile, East of I 94 on the South side of 23 Mile offers a 'special needs' worship on the First Saturday of the Month. It gives opportunity for new friendships and worship. Spread the word - - -



Thank you Sandy Knoell for he 'heads up' on the Jesus story on the History Channel. If you missed at on Monday you can go to You Tube.

The Wednesday evening 'simple suppers' followed by guided meditation has been a stretching experience for me and the participants. From Hand, to Barge, to Object, and Bread and next week we mediate on Wine. Jesus called Himself the 'Bread of Life' and so much goes into the perfect loaf of bread. The dough is pushed and pulled and twisted and each culture of people that has come to our country has brought their own bread, the staff of life.

For us, Jesus is the Breadwinner: Communion is the breadline which leads us into life everlasting. Jesus arrived in Bethlehem, meaning House of Bread, and He begins Holy Week in Bethany, meaning House of Stress.

We need the time in kneading as it takes time to let our minds

wonder as we pull, push, flip, and twist. Bread making takes time and tenderness to make the perfect Truthful loaf, our loaf that adds our energy, our past, our truth into the mix. As the water, yeast, salt, maybe sugar, and flour (natural substances) are added with our love and truth we make and we become 'the Body of Christ'.

Think of the breads you like, what is their origin: Italian Bread, dark German breads, corn bread, the Greek flat breads, the Irish Soda Bread, all the non-yeast recipes, the pita bread, optatek of Poland, Pizza & Focaccia from Italy, Israel's matzo, the tortilla of Mexico. Note that every culture that has come to our shores brought the gift of their food and especially their bread. Let Us Break Bread Together!

Easter is around the corner; Easter Egg Hunts will happen reminding us that the empty egg is a symbol of the empty tomb, Springtime of 'new life' has begun and God is Good all the time! All the time, God is Good! KatieD+

SPRING BREAK WITH GRANDMA

