

Read the verses and ponder the questions several times a day. And discuss the study with others. Jesus says where two or more are gathered together in his name, he is there with them. You are invited to join Pastor Mark and other LLC members on Wednesday at 6:30 PM in the church library for a group study of this topic and these texts.

Mary of Bethany was the sister of Martha and of Lazarus. All were good friends of Jesus. Mary and Martha attended to Jesus, though in quite different ways, when he first visited them in Bethany (Luke 10:38-42). Sometime later, at the sisters' behest, Jesus comes to the tomb of the dead Lazarus and raises him to new life (John 11:1-44). Now, Jesus visits again, this time just days before he is arrested and put to death himself.

Three of the Gospels tell this story: Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8. Matthew and Mark tell of an unnamed woman who came to him with an alabaster jar of costly ointment and poured it on Jesus' head. John names her as Mary of Bethany and that she anoints Jesus' feet and wipes them with her hair. In each account the woman is reproached in anger, in Matthew by the disciples and in Mark by "some" who were present. John names a scheming Judas Iscariot as the reproacher. And in each case, Jesus comes to the woman's defense. Though the details differ slightly, each Gospel writer places this woman at the center of Jesus ministry and his journey to the Cross.

Read the story, in John's account, and then consider the commentary and questions for each day.

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." John 12:1-8 (NRSV)

Monday Gratitude

Jesus comes to Bethany a few days before Passover, in Jewish tradition a time of gratitude for God's mercy and deliverance. Though the reason for Jesus' visit is not established in the text, his hosts (Lazarus and his sisters, in John's account, and Simon, the leper, in Matthew and Mark) had much reason to be grateful to Jesus. Anointing Jesus is a sign of gratitude.

How have you shown gratitude to Jesus?

Tuesday Refuge

Jesus comes to Bethany under the threat of arrest and of death. Likely, Lazarus' home (and the homes of other followers in Bethany) was a safe place, at least for the time, for Jesus and his closest followers. Certainly, at this unsettled time Jesus might want to be amongst his best friends and those who might give him protection and comfort. Anointing Jesus is a matter of attending to Jesus in his time of trial, just as he had attended to these friends in their lives.

How has Jesus attended to you in your life?

How have you attended to him?

Wednesday Sacrifice

The ointment was costly, we are told. (Nard is oil extracted from the balsam tree and at the time would have been imported from India). Three hundred denarii would have been considered a year's wages for a common person. For Mary, the ointment likely was her dowry, and its use on this occasion would have affected her future prospects significantly. And in each gospel, she is questioned about her priorities. Surely, she would have taken seriously the Jewish traditions of serving the poor, yet she chooses to use her riches in another way. Anointing Jesus is a choice of sacrifice, anticipating the even greater sacrifice Jesus was about to make for his friends.

How have you sacrificed for Jesus?

Thursday Faith

Mary's sacrifice certainly required faith. She had sat at Jesus' feet and listened his teaching. And she was Jesus' friend. Yet, as a young woman, her approach to Jesus and the intimate acts (in John's gospel) of anointing and then wiping his feet with her hair, would have been considered bold, if not scandalous. Anointing Jesus demonstrates Mary's faith, not only in Jesus' words, but in her very relationship with this man, her friend and her God.

Have you ever questioned your approach to Jesus?

Friday Awareness and Foresight

Jesus tells those who reproached Mary that she had bought the oil for the day of his burial. In Matthew (26:12) and Mark (14:8), Jesus says she has used the oil to prepare his body for burial. Though Jesus had foretold his death many times, it was Mary of Bethany who first comes to grip with this prophecy and does something to prepare for it. Put to death as a criminal, it would have been uncertain how his body would be treated after his death. Mary knows, because she has listened to Jesus, that he will die soon. She does what she can to prepare Jesus for that day. Anointing Jesus is an acceptance of truth and acting in accordance with it.

Put yourself into those days before Jesus' death. What would you have hoped to do to prepare yourself, and Jesus, for that day?

Saturday Good News

In Matthew (26:13) and Mark (14:9), Jesus says of the woman who has anointed him, "Truly I tell you, whenever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." (Interesting, though slightly different details in each account, each writer recounts Jesus' words the same, word for word.) Mary is revered as one of the great women of the Bible, and in some religious traditions she is considered a saint. For Jesus, what "she has done" was to demonstrate all that would be important in the Gospel going forward: truth and acceptance, faith and action, and love and kindness. Anointing Jesus is a proclaiming of the Good News!

For what will you be remembered when the Good News is proclaimed?

God, thank you for the opportunities we have to anoint Jesus in our lives. Amen

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