

Sermon 13<sup>th</sup> March 2016: Text John 12 vs1-9

1. When I preached here on the 10<sup>th</sup> January, Jesus had come to be baptised by John. The heavens had opened, the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus for His earthly ministry and God's voice of approval came from heaven.

2. Today, our Gospel reading is of 3 years later.

3. It's 6 days before the Jewish Passover. By the seventh, Jesus' body will have been laid to rest in the tomb. The work for which the Holy Spirit anointed Him complete.

4. But before all the dramatic events of those 6 days begin, we have this remarkable story of Jesus' anointing.

5 For the third time in the gospels, Jesus is at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, in the village of Bethany, just outside Jerusalem.

5.1 His first visit was when Martha complained about her sister not helping with the work in the kitchen., the second was raising Lazarus from the dead: and the third, today's reading.

5.2. A meal is being served in honour of Jesus together with His disciples. It's a celebration and thanksgiving for Lazarus and his miraculous return to life.

5.3 **Lazarus** had become **quite famous**. Many people knew him, had known of his illness and death, and had attended his funeral. Being so near to Jerusalem, word had spread, and folk came out to see for themselves. This had been no ordinary healing miracle. Many, we are told, put their faith in Jesus.

**8 So this is the scene at the Bethany home.**

8.1 **Lazarus**, raised from the dead, seated with Jesus, fit and well for all to see.

8.2 Surprise, surprise, **Martha** is once more serving.

8.3 And **where was Mary?** At the feet of Jesus!

8.4 At the earlier meal Mary had sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His words.

At the death of Lazarus Mary went to meet Jesus . And when she met Him what did she do? She fell at His feet and pleaded with Him.

And now this new story features Mary once more at Jesus' feet! She is anointing His feet with an expensive ointment.

8.5 In fact, the 2 parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark say, she anointed His head. I think this is what happened. It was the normal way of anointing. Jesus said she had anointed His **body** for burial. I'm sure she anointed His head, let the ointment run generously over His body and finally anointed His feet, letting her hair down to wipe them.

8.6 John, in his gospel, emphasises the feet because that was the special, most moving and dramatic part.

Everyone anoints the head, but in Mary's case she anointed Him all over ending at His feet. It shows the full extent of Mary's devotion to the Lord Jesus.

8.7 The readings in all 3 versions emphasise that the ointment was very **expensive**. Not your every day olive oil.

8.8 It was worth at least 300 denarii , equivalent to a workman's yearly income.

8.9 **I tried to think what an equivalent figure would be for us today.**

Someone on the minimum wage, might earn around £14,000

Even if we halve the figure to £7,000, and that would represent a very poor income, not enough we'd say to feed, house and clothe a family.

**Could you imagine the reaction to anyone today pouring £7000 of the most expensive ointment on anyone in one go?!**

Putting this into a modern context might be questionable but which ever way you look at it pouring someone's yearly income away in a single gesture is **extraordinary even outrageous!**

9. Not surprisingly there was a reaction.

9.1 Of course when we read in John's gospel it was **Judas** who objected and that his motives were coloured by the fact that he was a thief we might dismiss his attitude.

But it's clear there was general disapproval and criticism.

Mark says vaguely, **it was by some of those present,**

Matthew says bluntly, **it was the disciples.**

We get the idea that there was general muttering and support of Judas who was probably the one who actually voiced the disapproval.

9.2 It only goes to emphasise this really was an expensive gesture by Mary. **The poor disciples.** They had given up everything to follow Jesus. 300 denarii, a year's income. **It was too much.**

Listen to Mark's account. "Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another. **"Why this waste? And they rebuked her harshly"**

9.3 **People can be very critical** about the way money is spent by charities. When you are **spending money other people have donated** you have to be very, very careful. If they aren't happy they probably won't give to your charity in future.

9.4 **But sometimes extraordinary payments are justified.**

9.5 Let me share with you one example Global Care is presently wrestling with. A little girl called **Dorra** lives in Sri Lanka with her parents in abject poverty. They live in a slum on the beach.

Dorra is in poor health, undernourished and lacking in most of the basics of what we think of as normal life.

She has recently been included on Global Care's sponsorship programme. She now receives a meal every day, receives a basic education, has a school uniform, and access to washing facilities and basic medical care.

9.6 Her life has changed **but she has one great problem:** she is virtually totally deaf and therefore can't speak either. She was born with a defect; something is missing.

9.7 As a result of the health care provided by GC she has been examined by various medical people and, it seems, there is an operation available today by which there is every possibility she will be able to hear. We are told £12,000 would cover all the expenses to transform her life.

9.8 **Fancy being able to hear for the first time!**

In the third world a disabled person, who can't hear and speak and lives in poverty, faces the most awful prospects as she grows up.

I'd rather not describe what can often happen to children, especially girls, in this situation.

9.9 £12,000 exceeds what GC pays each year for the whole of the Sri Lankan project.

If we gave an extra £12,000 to the project it would mean several more children being able to receive meals, education and basic medical care.

### **Why spend it all on one child?**

This is a typical problem the staff and trustees face. **There is no simple answer.**

9.10 Subject to some final checks to be satisfied the operation is the best option and has a good chance of success we are planning to go ahead and try to raise the money.

Some might think it outrageously expensive, spent on just one, seemingly insignificant child without even a guarantee it will be successful.

## **10. Jesus' response to Mary suggests He might be very keen for us to try.**

10.1 So what was Jesus' attitude?

How did He respond to His troubled, indignant and harshly censoring disciples..... and to extravagant Mary?

In Mark's account we read:

Jesus said, **"leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing to me."**(REPEAT)

### **He didn't share His disciples indignation.**

He wasn't **outraged** by her lack of convention at a meal served in His honour.

He wasn't **embarrassed** by her excesses.

He wasn't **calculating and critical** of the cost.

He received her action as a beautiful thing. The devotion and love of a humble woman who was so at home at the feet of Jesus.

She hung on his every word, she knew to bring her anxieties and needs to Him and she expressed all this in her outrageous act of anointing his body and wiping his feet with her hair with this most expensive ointment.

11 In 7 days time Jesus himself would make an even greater, more outrageous, gift when He willingly died upon the cross.

The One who never sinned, willingly made a sin offering for us, the just for the unjust , to bring us to God.

**Was there ever a greater gift, a more beautiful act of love?**

## 12 . So what should be our response to today's lesson?

12.1 It comes as a challenge to us.

12.2 Nothing we do or give can ever repay God for what He has done for us. That sometimes leads to complacency. We can stand condemned by our own lack of love and zeal. We take it too much for granted, as if we deserved it.

12.2 But I am not going to tell you to go home and make some outrageously generous gift for some good cause, even though God does sometimes lay such things on our hearts.

12.4 This is what I suggest.

In a short time we will be invited to come to the communion rail. To take into our hands and into our mouths a piece of bread which represents to us the very body of the Lord Jesus, broken for us. And then the cup, which speaks of the blood of Christ, shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins.

As we receive these gifts of love, let us **resolve afresh** to open our hearts to Almighty God; and to seek to serve Him afresh, with grateful hearts, in a Spirit of generosity and love.

Were the whole realm of nature, mine  
That were an offering far too small.  
Love so amazing so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all