

Monday of Holy Week

Readings: Isaiah 42:1–9, Hebrews 9:11–15
Mary anoints Jesus; John 12:1–11



Jesus was staying with friends in the run-up to the Passover and they're relaxing at the table. Lazarus - who Jesus raised from the dead - is the host, and was sitting at the same table as Jesus, with a couple of others. As usual, Martha is serving and Mary is listening intently. Guests are few, Mary is single and in a private home so her head is uncovered - had she been in public, she would have had a head covering.² Nothing shocking about that, until she pulls out a huge pot filled with exotic Indian perfume and pours it over Jesus' feet, drying them with her hair. Mary must have had significant funds because the perfume is in a jar roughly twelve times the size of a usual bottle of scent - a rough estimate in current terms is around £14,000 worth of perfume. No wonder Judas Iscariot - who was often creaming off surplus money from the disciples' purse - was jealous. He completely misses the symbolic anointing of Jesus before his death, and he sees Mary's act of devotion as wasteful and ridiculous.

The voice of Lazarus

"It's the greatest honour imaginable to have Jesus in my home, sitting at my table. He may be a dear friend but since he called me in the tomb, woke me from my slumber and raised me from the dead - how can I ever see him as a 'normal' friend? I have no idea how to express my thanks because there are no words. We talk, share food and time together but it will never be enough, and I find that frustrating. But then Mary has a flash of inspiration. Maybe that's why she's been particularly quiet this morning, because the jar she pulls from behind her - like a stunning magic trick, perfume from thin air - is huge. She breaks the seal and the oil falls onto Jesus feet, catching the light and the scent is overwhelming. No one knows what to say. Judas is jealous of the apparent waste of money; I'm jealous because Mary's amazing expression of love, thanks, faith and devotion is stunning. I have no words."



Sometimes it's hard to know what to say, whether it's 'thank you', 'I love you', or (especially difficult) 'I'm sorry'. How would you like to express your feelings in a way that will be understood - with, or without, words? To whom would you express your feelings?

◆ Lord, give us wisdom before we speak, understanding while we listen, sensitivity towards those we meet, and the perspective of your kingdom. Amen³.

²Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Zondervan (2019) John 12:3.

³ John L. Bell, in Angela Ashwin (ed), The Book of a Thousand Prayers: Zondervan (1996), p.69