

The Turning Point
March 21, 2010 Lent 5C
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Scripture: John 12:1-11

12Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary 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. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(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.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." ⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Proclamation of the Word

The stench of death is still in the room.

Lazarus is sitting there- days fresh from the tomb.

To understand today's passage we must go back in time, hit rewind.

Just a few days ago, Mary and Martha called for their good friend, Jesus when their brother was sick.

When Jesus arrived, it was too late.

Lazarus had died.

He had been dead four days by the time Jesus came to Bethany.

These friends meant so much to Jesus that the gospels record that Jesus wept. The Bible doesn't say, "Jesus wiped a couple of tears from his eye" It says, "Jesus wept."

Both Martha and Mary told Jesus that if he had only been there, their brother would not have died for they know he is God and can work healing miracles.

Not only did Jesus find Mary and Martha distraught and weeping.

Chapter 11 of John's gospel says all the Jews were weeping.

Jesus was so moved, he began to weep too.

He tells them that he is resurrection and life itself. Then in a strange twist of events, Jesus says aloud, *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."* (John 11:40-41)

Then Jesus rears back and cries in a loud voice,
"Lazarus, Come out!"

And the crowd is shaken by the volume and the authority of his voice.
Just as God spoke the world into being, chaos into order, and blew the
breath of life into Adam and Eve,
Jesus speaks and everything changes.

Then out comes the man wrapped like a mummy- four days dead...meaning he
was really dead!

And the stench, oh boy, the stench when that stone was rolled away.
The anointing oil and the perfume from his burial had faded,
only the smell of death remained.

Can you imagine it? Weeping turns to joy!

But the joy only lasts for a while because this is when it really became dangerous
for Jesus. Word spreads of the resurrection of Lazarus.

Many of the Jews believe in him.

And that is when the trouble starts among the leaders.

When news travels the Jesus resurrects a dead Lazarus, many
believe, and news travels to Jerusalem.

Listen to what happens as told by Peterson's *The Message* from John Chapter
11

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁸ *That was a turnaround for many of the Jews who were with Mary. They saw what Jesus did, and believed in him. But some went back to the Pharisees and told on Jesus. The high priests and Pharisees called a meeting of the Jewish ruling body. "What do we do now?" they asked. "This man keeps on doing things, creating God-signs. If we let him go on, pretty soon everyone will be believing in him and the Romans will come and remove what little power and privilege we still have."*

⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ *Then one of them—it was Caiaphas, the designated Chief Priest that year—spoke up, "Don't you know anything? Can't you see that it's to our advantage that one man dies for the people rather than the whole nation be destroyed?"*

⁵³⁻⁵⁴ *From that day on, they plotted to kill him. So Jesus no longer went out in public among the Jews.*

That was it. Did you hear it?

That was the turning point.

And there was no turning back.

This is where we find ourselves today in John's telling of the Passover and holy week happenings that led to the cross.

Mary and Martha throw a dinner party to celebrate
with Jesus as the guest of honor.

The stench of death still lingers on Lazarus.

And we know that the smell of death is on Jesus.

Martha is doing what she does best.

She is busy with taking care of her guests and serving them dinner.

In fact, the verb for Martha served, is *diakone*" or Martha *deaconed*. This is where we get our understanding of the role of deacon.

Martha knows how to serve, to feed, to offer hospitality.

And she is doing it with extra flare for her brother was dead
and now he is alive.

She cannot help but want to show her thanks to Jesus and has
to do something to respond.

There is nothing more effusive than gratitude enacted.

She praises God by readying her home and feeding her guests.

Mary, in the same way, wants to show her gratitude to Jesus.

Mary was the one who really got it. She has heard the rumors.

She knows that in saving her brother, Jesus has brought too much
attention upon himself for many are believing in him.

And now she is doing the only thing she can think to do...

show Jesus how much she loves him and how thankful she is for
saving her brother...for bringing joy back to her home.

And we know that when time is short for those you love
every minute matters and time is precious.

She doesn't want to miss a chance to let him know.

And then she does it.

She kneels at his feet...

just as she had done before when she would sit at his feet and listen to him
teach.

Teaching her about God's intentions for the world...how those who are most
locked out of grace by religion could be included into the fold, how blind people
were seeing for the first time, and how God valued her...even her...so she
became a disciple of Jesus. She had committed herself to listening to him and
following what he was calling her to do.

And she learned from him that the best way to be faithful is to show it.

But her gift was unexpected.

The people in the room were confused, probably uncomfortable
as she unloosed her hair neatly tied back.

She began to anoint his feet with perfumed oil.
Only dead people are anointed this way.

If she thought him king, she would have rubbed the nard on his hair...making the dry hair, rich and shiny.

But Mary knows something the others cannot come to grips with
or are ready to admit.

Jesus will die.

He is being hunted down.

He is not able to be seen among the Jews because the leaders
are plotting to kill him.

He has become a threat to the Roman Peace, *pax romana*, which has been
established putting the Jews in a precarious position.

Did you hear the anxious Jewish leaders when I read *The Message*?

They think that the more people believe in Jesus,
the more the Romans will oppress them, taking away the little
bit of power and privilege they have as an occupied people.

Oh, how the twin idols of comfort and security corrupt and
coerce us into taking sides with power.

Mary knows Jesus is about to receive a death sentence because the system
cannot tolerate his disruption.

She does the only thing she can think to do... show him how much
she loves him,

how thankful she is,

and help him prepare for the difficult days ahead. She takes the

Nard, the perfumed oil, worth enough money to feed a family for a year and
anoints his feet with her love.

There is nothing frugal about love and extravagant gratitude.

Mary knows the generous nature of God,
and that there will be no limit to God's love.

The world is about to turn- to change.

This is the turning point.

In the same manner, Jesus will take bread and cup- his body and
blood and give it to his friends so that they may know that he is God,
God revealed both in suffering and in new life.

After supper, he will take a basin and kneel at their feet
just as Mary has done for him, and he will wash
their feet...taking the form of a servant,
deaconing his disciples.

He will give them a command,

"Love one another as I have loved you."

Love shows itself best in serving.

Jesus says that is how they will recognize that you are my disciples, by
loving one another.

Mary knows that it is human to only see the limits of grace and love.

Judas complains how impractical and wasteful she is, but she knows the extravagant love of her Savior.

She knows how costly Jesus' love for humanity will be when he gives his life.

So she tells the message, using actions and not words, lavishly pouring out the best of what she has just as the Creator God will when God's Son parades into Jerusalem in a few days to shed his blood.

She knows that there is an endless supply of love where God is concerned while others can only see the limits.

She reminds us of his costly gift and tells again the message that God is never frugal when it comes to love.

Costly grace is poured out for her,
why should she hold anything back?