

## THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY – JOHN 12: 1-8

Today, I move to the New Testament, as we continue to reflect on the Passion of Jesus. Maybe just the evening before Palm Sunday it seems that Jesus was a guest, sharing a meal at the house of his friends, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, whom he had previously raised from the dead. This account only appears in John, though the other Gospels have a similar story, apparently involving a different woman, much earlier in Jesus' ministry, and in Galilee.

Here, the woman who brings the precious ointment is his friend Mary, while true to character Martha is busy serving at table. Mary's gesture is extravagant in the extreme, she breaks the alabaster jar and pours the contents over Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. The fragrance of the ointment fills the house. If I enter the story in my imagination it is easy to see that those present would have been shocked and surprised at the sheer extravagance of this act, and we are told that Judas Iscariot is outraged, declaring the ointment could have been sold for a lot of money and the proceeds given to the poor. However, John has no illusions about Judas' motive, he adds, almost as an aside, that he was in the habit of helping himself from their collective purse.

Jesus tells them to leave her alone, as she has saved this for the day of his burial, and doubtless Jesus was well aware of Judas' motives....he maybe was also comforted by the loving and completely way over the top gesture from a dear friend. And to us, in our context of social distancing and avoidance of physical touch, the act seems quite extraordinary, perhaps more than usual.

I wonder whether perhaps Jesus was able to derive a little comfort around the cold and brutal act of his crucifixion, did his wounded feet perhaps feel a little comfort from the memory of Mary's gesture. In a time when he felt separated from the love of his Father, could he draw some comfort from a human and loving gesture? Of course we shall never know, my thoughts are just that....thoughts.

Here is a short poem written by Phineas Fletcher (1582- 1650) which perhaps has some relevance to this account of the anointing:-

*Drop, drop, slow tears, and bathe those beauteous feet,  
which brought from heaven the news and Prince of Peace.  
Cease not wet eyes, his mercies to entreat;  
to cry for vengeance sin doth never cease.  
In your deep floods drown all my faults and fears;  
nor let his eye see sin, but through my tears.*

The next time we hear of Jesus and his disciples sharing meal together, is of course at the Last Supper, which we will reflect upon tomorrow. Until then, may God be with you and all for whom you pray.

In Christ's love Alice.