

## The Rest of the Story (3Apr22) John12:1-8

This is a small part of the larger sweep, encapsulating both what comes before and after, propelling the story toward Holy Week.

The sweep might start in chapter 9, with confrontations after Jesus heals a man born blind, which continue into chapter 10, where Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who comes to offer abundant life, versus the thief who breaks in to steal (the only other time a thief is mentioned besides being applied here to Judas). Jesus so infuriates some people they want to kill him and he has to flee from Jerusalem.

This death versus abundant life flows to the chapter prior today, 11, which begins by saying that Lazarus was ill, the first introduction of these characters. In presenting Mary, it alludes that she will anoint Jesus' feet. Shortly after the introduction, Lazarus dies, and Jesus says he's going to go wake him up, even though it risks arrest and death to go back that close to Jerusalem. (Indeed, Bethany is just on the back side of the Mount of Olives. If there weren't now an apartheid wall in the way, you could walk to the temple mount in a half hour.)

Jesus arrives when it clearly seems too late to help. Martha expresses hope in the resurrection, but Mary just weeps that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus may not be dead. Jesus weeps with her.

He asks to go to the tomb, and they warn him away because the stench will be overpowering after four days—note that negative strong aroma versus today's perfume filling the house. Jesus ignores the warning and yells for Lazarus to come out. He, indeed, comes out, still wrapped in his burial shroud. The next appearance of the dead man is at the start of what you heard today, where Lazarus is at the table with Jesus.

In between, there's conspiracy, plotting against Jesus. The chief priests and other religious leaders fret, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." That might be a real concern, where their intent is to minimize damage. Indeed, their plans are solidified

as one of them figures "it is better to have one man die than to have the whole nation destroyed."

That falls before today's passage, making an odd bracket that immediately after today's passage it says they're also plotting to kill Lazarus. Or maybe it's not odd but obvious, given the spiral of violence.

With that frame, here's today's section once more in parts: *Six days before the Passover*, it started. It will go on to say the next day is Palm Sunday. This is within the last week of Jesus' life, and within these festivals.

*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... The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume...* I tried to give a sample of that room-filling fragrance. I'd note that a few drops—a fraction of an ounce—filled this great big room in a test run Thursday. It's harder to notice with masks and all the ventilation, but there's also a dab anointed onto the feet on your bulletin, if you're daring enough to sniff that for a sample. (And I wish I had smell-o-vision for those online.)

*Mary took [the] costly perfume made of pure nard anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.* I invite you to think about using your hair on somebody's feet. You can do another shout-out participation, like Natalie led. So let me ask: what are your feelings with that? [nervous laughter]

We'll come back to more echoes of this anointing.

*But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him)—there's some foreshadowing—said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii—that's 300 days' wages. I saw prices up to \$200 per ounce for this stuff, which might not be quite as expensive as that year's worth of wages described, though still plenty extravagant. and the money given to the poor?"* (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief—there's that

word, contrasting Judas with a good shepherd—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)—more foreshadowing—You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Again, next is the plan to kill Lazarus, because he also became a popular attraction. And the next day is Palm Sunday. Jesus is acclaimed as a coming king, which could also fit with anointing and the notion of being the Messiah or the Christ. The crowds are coming, even those not Jewish, and as the leaders get more upset, Jesus says that in his death, he will draw all people to himself.

But that’s the end of Jesus’ public ministry. By the start of the next chapter, 13, it’s the night of the Last Supper. Getting up from the table, Jesus ties a towel around himself and begins to wipe his disciples’ feet. Clearly, this echoes how Mary had wiped his feet earlier in the week. And he says, “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you,” and that it’s about love. I’ve always wondered if Jesus got this idea from what Mary did for him, or whether she inherently knew how to follow the example even before she was shown or told to do it.

Many see her in contrast to Judas, who, after having his feet wiped by Jesus, leaves the supper and goes out into the night to betray him. Jesus said that Mary was preparing for his death, and in a much different way, Judas will, too.

So that points us on toward later that evening with the betrayal and arrest in the garden, toward the authorities who still don’t understand and mock Jesus as king, toward the cross the next day, and a different anointing as Jesus’ body is prepared for burial, his life laid down in love, so that this Good Shepherd can take it up again and share abundant life, drawing all to him.

