

Sunday 4/7/19 Jesus' Visit to Bethany

HEAVENLY FATHER, PLEASE GUIDE MY WORDS THAT THEY MAY HELP TO GLORIFY YOUR NAME AND PURPOSE. AMEN

So.... Here we are. Please do not be alarmed - I have permission to do this. And I would be lying if I told you I think that *this* is a good idea. I see mostly familiar faces, but if you are new here, please do not judge your experience at Saint Andrews on this.

We did study and practice for this new part of the service - Lay Preaching. It has been and is a challenge – and we were blessed with an excellent assortment of classmates, all have been encouraging, enlightening, and exceedingly helpful. And the practice lesson for Lay Preaching was the passage of the Good Shepherd. This was a great experience - but let's face it - In our Faith - At Saint Andrews - the parable of the Good Shepherd is pretty much a layup - it's a gimme!

So... for the First live action, the Lesson is about Jesus' visit to Bethany. Theologically it is the start of the Passion of Christ in his fateful return to Jerusalem. There is a ton of research and writing on this 164 word passage – perhaps millions of words about the 164 word passage. It has been sermoned on the order of the number served by McDonalds. So it is impossible to do this full justice in just these few words.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus stops in Bethany and is invited to dinner at the House of Lazarus, whom Jesus has just brought back to life (revivified) - and other than it being at his house, Lazarus does not speak in this passage – quiet... perhaps pondering, we can only wonder, his recent return to the living. The significance of Lazarus' presence is the foretelling of Jesus' own death and resurrection to come.

After dinner Mary washes Jesus' feet with an astonishing amount of exotic and very expensive perfume (in today's parlance say worth around \$40,000 bucks), so a very obviously, extravagant gesture. She anoints Jesus with this perfume and then proceeds to wipe his feet with her HAIR! I have been on the Planet for 66 years and have seen some things, but this certainly caught my attention and I thought about Mary and her care of Jesus. This event points to Jesus' washing of his disciples feet at the last supper and his instruction to the twelve to wash each other as a tradition of their discipleship.

Also among the dinner guests is Judas Iscariot - (And I just have to say here that I think it is hard to find *anyone* in history who has ruined a perfectly good name for future generations more than Judas Iscariot. When was the last time you heard a proud parent introduce you to little Judas? You just don't hear the name anymore. So Judas pipes up that he objects to the wasting of the fine perfume on Jesus' anointing – complaining that it's value should have been donated to the poor, and put into the purse of which he is in charge. He scolds Mary about the use of the perfume, and Jesus immediately responds by confronting Judas and saying

“LEAVE HER ALONE You talk a good game about helping the poor but you really don’t.” We learn that while he is the Fund Manager of this Purse for the Poor, he is taking the money for his own use, and not giving it to the poor. - Judas is here revealed as a thief... an embezzler... he is untrustworthy. Scholars tell us that early Christians pointed to Judas’ greed as an explanation for his betrayal of Jesus.

So here it is. This passage puts the very most dedicated disciple – the essence of caring devotion, who puts no price on her discipleship, in the same place as the most recognizable villain - a thief - a betrayer of Trust - essentially a murderer. A very stark contrast to each other - Mary the most devoted and *very importantly* the very first one to understand the true meaning of Discipleship - and Jesus’ betrayer - the greedy, do anything to get ahead, the ugliest of humanity - and they are both disciples of Jesus.

So one obvious question is who is more in need of Jesus’ love? Don’t get me wrong - I am a very big Mary fan here - but Jesus did not give his life for our goodness, for our spectacular acts of devotion and kindness – He gave his life for our Sins. Clearly we have to come to terms here with Judas. It is just easier to have him lurking around unforgiven and forsaken.

Last week the reading from 2nd Corinthians tells us that God has entrusted us with reconciliation in Jesus’ death. Reconciliation is up to us. Perhaps this is the ultimate challenge for reconciliation for us. Mary the awesome perfume lady with the cool hair, is a disciple of Jesus. Judas the treacherous, is a disciple of Jesus.

Scholars tell us that this very stark contrast in Jesus' interaction at the dinner in Bethany with "Good and Evil" if you will, is the challenge OF all of us, FOR all of us.

The ultimate reconciliation though is that, in the way of Jesus Christ, both Mary and Judas are forgiven in the eyes of the Lord. They are in no way the same. They are certainly not equal. Judas' power is destructive. Mary's power is in the discovery of the meaning of discipleship. She is the first follower out of everyone, to understand the meaning of discipleship - Judas never does.

The fact is that Mary is just not lost. A woman in Jesus' time – so strong, so perceptive and smart - so quietly powerful – unashamed about her devotion – that she gets it, and is the first to get it (perhaps especially in relation to our time right now) is something to behold. We should absolutely celebrate Mary.

As you may notice, I came to admire Mary out of this, especially her power of understanding - and I do take pity on Judas not just because of his actions, but especially because of his blindness. And while I am not leading the movement to bring back the name Judas – Jesus does tell us that we need to find forgiveness. AMEN