

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - 5th Sunday in Lent

I think we'll begin with an update on a family that we've begun praying for.

Chris and Rachel and his family, he was in a car crash last week in Northern Montana.

Rachel was part of the congregation where I was and I served and Sharon and I lived in the 90s.

I just can't believe it's that long ago. But the surgeries for Michael, which involve both internal injuries and orthopedic, have gone

encouragingly well. The family does request continued prayers because recovery will be very lengthy.

So thank you for the prayers you have offered and we ask you to keep praying.

[Music]

[Music]

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 12th chapter.

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 reclining with Jesus.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair.

The house was filled with the fragrance of perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples who was the one about to betray him,

said, "Why was this perfume not sold for 300 denarii and the money given to the poor?"

He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief.

He kept the common person 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. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.

The gospel of our Lord.

The Sermon

I want you to be seated.

"Grace and peace to you from a God who loves extravagantly and scandalously.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and redeemer."

Amen.

As I was reading that gospel, I thought, how would a person who had never heard this story hear this gospel?

John uses a lot of insider language and makes references to things that we already know.

But if you were just parachuted into John chapter 12, wouldn't it just weird you out a little bit that one of the characters in the gospel

is somebody who used to be dead and now ism'd? That usually doesn't happen in our experience now, does it?

Is that a deal breaker, though, for hearing this story?

That's a rhetorical question, because I don't really have an answer to that.

Now, for those of us who've heard the story before and who have journeyed through John's gospel now and again,

maybe there are connections that we're already making to things that happened before the dinner at Bethany,

things that happened after the dinner at Bethany,

and commentators among us actually point out contrasts that are so sharp

that they're designed to stop us a bit in our tracks and to think about what is it to

follow Jesus

and just who is this Jesus whom we follow anyway.

The contrasts come in the details and a bit of backstory.

Lazarus, formerly dead, stinking dead, his sister said, because he'd been in the tomb for four days by the time Jesus arrives,

it says, "Roll away the stone."

That wasn't very many days before this supper in Bethany, and so the stench of death probably still lingered

in the sinuses and in the nasal passages of people gathered at that supper,

but this night in Bethany, just before Passover, the aroma of food cooking maybe began to take its place,

but then that aroma is overpowered with this costly ointment.

Pure nard from the nard plant, the spick nard plant, broken open to anoint Jesus.

So where there was only death, there's life in a meal, and then what do we make of the aroma of the anointing?

What does it prefigure?

Sometimes it was used for a royal coronation, but it was put on the head, not the feet.

So maybe there's another contrast.

But those feet of Jesus would carry him to Jerusalem, and eventually would carry him to Golgotha.

So maybe there was something about the feet being anointed that was significant to the people gathered.

If you want contrast, think about Judas' response to Mary's actions.

You know, a couple hundred denarii, that's about a year's wages.

That would buy a lot of meals for people who are hungry.

Now, from my mind, if any other disciple would have said that, I think I would have immediately taken that side.

And Judas isn't wrong, is he? At least in what he says.

And here's where John lets us in on a few little secrets.

Judas has already been embezzling, and that's really what's going on there.

And Judas would be the one who for thirty pieces of silver would betray Jesus in not too many days hence from this meal, where Mary breaks open the costly oil.

It's interesting though that the only protest we get is from Judas.

Homes in Jesus' time and place, even with a private dinner, were pretty well open to public spectacle.

Everybody knew everybody's business. They knew who the hosts of the dinner were, they knew who the guests were.

And so whatever happened in a dinner was considered a very public event.

Now, think about Mary. In public, removes her head covering. Never done. Never done.

She removes her head covering. She uses her hair to dry Jesus' feet.

Scandalous. Mary puts herself in a position of humility and humiliation even, to do what she's done.

And nobody protests that. It is interesting though that Jesus must have been taking copious notes because it wouldn't be too many days later.

What would he do? But take a basin and towel and wash the feet of his followers the older than they protest.

Oh no, Jesus, that's not something that you should be doing.

I just wanted to put the irony out there. I'll let you fuss with it.

But I love what the commentators say about this act of Mary's. That she embodies and fulfills Jesus' teachings before he even gives the instruction.

She understands all of this. She gets it. Unlike the designated treasurer, Judas, who sadly doesn't get it.

I'm revving up for Monday Thursday already, I can tell.

I don't want to give the whole thing away, but what happens Passover in the upper room with Jesus after he washed his feet?

Judas' feet get washed. Judas gets fed. Jesus has his number and still Jesus doesn't condemn him.

What does that mean?

There is a line in the prayers today, and it's one that has kind of wound its way through the liturgy, where Jesus is described as one pouring out his life for the sake of the other.

I think it's compelling that we see Mary pouring out this oil, this costly precious oil.

That's barely enough for us to comprehend.

And now, as we approach Holy Week, we are asked to comprehend Jesus with equal extravagance and equal personal risk.

Even God's extravagance and personal risk to pour out not fragrant oil, but his very essence and life force and being, and not for all happy, grateful recipients,

not for the herds and the pilots and the judges of the world, and all the rest of us bystanders too.

This sermon ends where last week's sermon ended, I think. It's scandal. It's gospel.

And as church, here we are, called to deal with that.

Amen.