

## TRUE TO HER CALLING: A MEMORIAL FOR HER

Hear again the Word of the Lord,

*Truly I say to all of you, "Wherever (the) Good News may have been proclaimed into the whole cosmos, then the thing which she did will be spoken of – for a memorial of her."<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

This is the day that we remember the events that took place near the time of Jesus' Triumphal entrance into Jerusalem in the year we date AD 33. Yesterday, 1981 years ago according to a widely accepted timetable of the events of Holy Week, Jesus cursed a fig tree and cleansed the Temple. This day recalls that year long ago, when a scribe questioned Jesus about the greatest Commandment; Jesus taught across from the Treasury in the Temple while commenting on the widow's offering mites; and Jesus was anointed for burial. St. Matthew and Mark place the anointing on that Tuesday, two days (evenings and mornings) before Jesus' Last Supper and all the events which followed. St. Mark's Gospel declares:

*And it was the Pascha and the Unleavened Bread after two days. And they sought, the chief priests and the scribes, how Him by deceit they might seize Him and put Him to death.<sup>2</sup>*

It is that anointing with sweet-smelling oil which is recorded to have come after those revelations which brings witness to us tonight that Jesus, as true Man and true God, even that night knew what was coming to Him in just a few days. We have publicly recalled such events of each Holy Week Tuesday here since 2008. In partial

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 14:9.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 14:1.

fulfillment of Jesus' words which are today's theme text, this congregation has been remembering that Tuesday for a week of Tuesdays now. On no other days except Holy Week Monday and Tuesday is the anointing of our Lord Jesus' body for burial before His arrest, trial, mockery, conviction, beating, crucifixion, and death remembered in the lectionaries of the Church. That is what Holy Week is about after all, as the small band of the faithful who comprised this morning's Matins congregation heard, as they were reminded of this truth:

*Let this be the summary of this (second) article (of the Creed), that the little word "Lord" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and now keeps us safe there.*<sup>3</sup>

The whole week, the whole month, the whole year, the whole of eternity, really, is about Jesus the Christ and what He has done, does, and will do for His people. So, tonight, a little part of that is recalled, in fulfillment of prophecy in this place, as it has been done now among us for several years. That is true for all congregations that follow this more ancient lectionary and care enough to provide the Lord's Services to His people on the days of Holy week.

Of course, a congregation may skip over the highly important Palm Sunday readings and hear the whole Passion Narrative on that Sunday instead. Then, they might hear in passing of Mary's anointing of Jesus from His sacred Head on down. Yet tonight, because we have chosen to let Palm Sunday be Hosanna Sunday, we are hearing what many people in the Church miss, every year: the remembrance of the woman's work for

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. 1959 (T. G. Tappert, Ed.) (414). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

Jesus in her response to the Faith He grants. It is, after all, recorded in three of the Gospel books, and the woman's work is paralleled by an earlier event of a similar nature in the fourth.<sup>4</sup> Keep in mind that this all is really about Jesus, even the response of Mary – St. John tells us the woman with the flask of sweet-smelling oil was Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus.<sup>5</sup> From the plot to kill Jesus – but *not in the Feast, lest the people will be in riot*<sup>6</sup> – did you catch that?- our text continues:

*Then, being in Bethany, at the house of Simon the leper, (in) His continually reclining at table, came (a) woman having (an) alabaster flask of sweet-smelling oil (of) genuine spikenard – (it was) very expensive; having crushed the alabaster flask, she poured (it) down upon His head.*<sup>7</sup>

For the benefit of the faithful of all generations afterward, the Evangelist places this event at a specific location. Bethany is located about 2 miles southeast of Jerusalem, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. We heard that Jesus was reclining at table, likely a triclinium, that which is represented in the configuration of our Altar Rails. A parallel text informs us that Jesus was not the only one at table – Lazarus, whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead, was there, as was Martha his sister, who was again serving.<sup>8</sup>

Martha was true to her calling – a servant at heart, a domestic caring woman. Lazarus was true to his calling, quietly reclining the Presence of the God Who had called him forth from the grave after four days of burial. Mary, too, was true to her calling – to be attentive to Jesus, to hear His Word and respond in the Faith. Others were there too,

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8; Matthew 26:6-13; cf. Luke 7:36-50.

<sup>5</sup> John 12:3.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 14:1.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 14:3.

<sup>8</sup> John 12:2.

in particular, one Judas Iscariot. He, as we have heard, was untrue to his calling to be disciple of Christ which would lead to apostleship.

Holy Week Tuesday, then, gives each of us the opportunity to view our lives in regard to our callings in reference to Jesus. Are you a hearer of the Word? Be true to that calling. Are you a servant, a table-waiter, in the Presence of Jesus? Be true to that calling. Are you one to whom Jesus has given much – even your faith and His eternal salvation – one whose calling is to give back to him with that which is very costly? Then, be true to your calling. Are you a disciple, one whom Jesus would send into this world with His Gospel, not just in the Office of the Holy Ministry, but in your daily vocation? Then, be true to your calling. Or, are you a pietist, or a thief, or a person of hardened heart when it comes to the things of the Good News of Jesus Christ? If so, be untrue to your calling! Repent, and believe the words of Jesus are for you. Be not as Judas Iscariot, falling from reclining in the Faith in the Lord's Presence, eating at Table with fellow sinners, serving as you have been served, and rejoicing when others do nice things for our Lord. Our text continues:

*And there were some who were angry among themselves, as said, "What waste has become of the sweet-smelling oil. For this sweet-smelling oil had power to have been sold for more than 300 denarii and (that) to be given to the poor!" And they snorted (at) her.<sup>9</sup>*

St. John informs us who "they" were, in part, as mentioned, "they" included Judas Iscariot. John, a likely eyewitness to this event, holds nothing back, as he describes Judas as a thief who tended the disciples' collective purse and stole from it. His words

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<sup>9</sup> Mark 14:4-5.

indicate a concern for the poor in the land, but his actions during and after this event, belie that care.

Now, there is truth in the statement of the value of the oil. That flask, broken open to show that Mary was “all in” in her offering, was worth about a year’s entire wages for a common day laborer of that era. How she came to its possession, we are not told. Perhaps it had been left over from the anointing she had given her brother Lazarus when he died. Whatever its source, in our day, that flask would be worth over \$15,000.00! That would put a single person just above the poverty level in our nation!<sup>10</sup> It is also a little bit less than our building expansion fund has accumulated in the few months since it was started – without a plan!

Perhaps you can understand why Judas and those of his camp that evening snorted at the waste. It may be the same here as the congregation moves forward with her expansion plans. It could be that some, as a few who have left this place over the years, some might say – “Hey, we could use that money to...”

If that may be you, examine your heart motives, and consider your place in the Body of Christ in this place. God, through human agency, put this building here. He has brought many souls to Faith who now recline at that Table. He is bringing more, from various places, walks of life, faith and no-faith, and it appears He has determined we need more room for those He wants to bring in to His Table. Examine your attitudes, and test them against God’s Word, and weigh your thoughts about those who are

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<sup>10</sup> Internet: <http://poverty.ucdavis.edu/faq/what-are-annual-earnings-full-time-minimum-wage-worker>, accessed, April 15, 2014.

following their vocations as good-givers to the expansion of the Lord's Church. Repent if you discover yourself in error, or speak the truth in love if you are convinced by the Holy Spirit that you are in the right. Remember the giver, and the Receiver of the gifts, and rejoice that we have Marys to waste the expense, Lazarauses to recline in silence, Marthas to tend the dinner guests. Our text continues:

*But Jesus said, "You all leave her (alone)! Why do you cause to trouble her? (A) good work she has worked for Me. For always the poor you have with yourselves, and when you all may continue to will, you have power for them to do good, but, Me, not always you will have."<sup>11</sup>*

Jesus answers Judas' complaint with... a quote from Scripture! He refers to the words of God recorded in Deuteronomy:

*For will never cease, the poor, out of the land. Therefore I command you, saying, "You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to your needy, and to your poor in the land"<sup>12</sup>*

Perhaps you just "got it" as I just grasped what Jesus was doing with His response. He was answering a Scripture quote out of context with the rest of the words of the verse! Judas, in his complaint, was following Satan's example – in the Garden of Eden and in the Temptation of Jesus! Wow, what a message to take home, the "context of Scripture" will tell the meaning of the teaching. Jesus teaching continues:

*She has done what she did; (she has) anticipated, anointing My Body for the burial preparation.<sup>13</sup>*

There, you have it, the deeper meaning of the text, the event which is being recalled tonight. Mary, the woman who gave the most expensive of gifts, anointing

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<sup>11</sup> Mark 14:6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 15:11.

<sup>13</sup> Mark 14:8.

Jesus' sinless Head with spikenard, did a good work: because, in her heart, He knew that she had decided to do this of her free, believing will. Hers is the attitude commended later, but one who once persecuted Jesus, as he teaches:

*(Let) each (one), just as he purposes in the heart, not from grudgingness or from compulsion; for (the) cheerful giver God sacrificially loves.<sup>14</sup>*

Then, having established that truth for those who are of the Faith, Jesus concludes, for today:

*Truly I say to all of you, "Wherever (the) Good News may have been proclaimed into the whole cosmos, then the thing which she did will be spoken of – for a memorial of her."<sup>15</sup>*

May that memorial be said to have taken place here this evening. Amen.

(Please stand)

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Holy Week Tuesday

Psalm 54; Jeremiah 11:18-20; I Timothy 6:12-14; Mark 14:1 - 15:46

April 15, 2014

*Pastor Michael A. Merhouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>14</sup> II Corinthians 9:7.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 14:9.