

Preparing for a New Season

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John 12:1-8

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 wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred 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 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. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me. ***The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.***

I would like to tag this message, ***Preparing for a New Season***. One sure way to know we have entered a new season is to acknowledge we are all sleep deprived as we move to daylight savings time. I admit, I love the longer days, but it will take me until Wednesday to adjust. We are also into the final days of Lent and next Sunday spring officially begins along with Holy Week.

Our scripture for today signals that Jesus' days on earth are quickly coming to an end. John wrote, it was six days before the Passover. Jesus was back at the home of those he loved, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. There is no sibling rivalry at this meal. It is in Luke's gospel where Mary and Martha have issues over who is working harder. At this dinner in John's gospel, Martha served the meal. Lazarus is alive and well and sitting at the table eating with Jesus and the other guests. And, Mary is moved to offer an intimate gift, of anointing Jesus' feet with a very expensive perfume and then wiping his feet with her hair.

This is a challenging text to wrap our minds around because we do not wash our feet before entering another's home. Occasionally, we enter a home where we are asked to take off our shoes. I usually freeze for a moment hoping I am not wearing the socks with the hole in them. But, in all my years of living, no one has offered to wash my feet as I entered their home. That ritual is not part of our culture.

Yet, when we are tired, sore, and at our wits end, having our feet rubbed is a wonderful, loving, and caring gift. In some instances, it is an act of bravery—not all of us have pretty feet—somebody say amen. Some of us have bunions, calluses, hammer toes, and smelly feet. So if you have a friend, spouse, or significant other who **wants** to rub your feet, or is **just willing** to rub your feet you have a keeper.

I enjoy getting a pedicure. I love the hot paraffin wax on my feet followed by a warm towel that's wrapped around them. Talk about melting into another place... But Mary's anointing was different from paying someone for a pedicure.

Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet was loving, caring, and profound. When one finds a story in all four gospels, there must be something to this story that all the gospel writers want us to get. Jesus said in our text, that Mary purchased the perfume to anoint His body after his death. But sometimes circumstances change and the Spirit leads us in another direction. At this meal while Jesus was yet alive, Mary decided to use some of the perfume on Jesus' feet. And, it was a good thing that Mary did, because Jesus' body never was anointed after being taken down from the cross. You remember the story. The women went to the tomb with the spices and ointments to prepare Jesus' body for burial but the tomb was empty. Jesus was not there. Mary's anointing in her home was the only one Jesus received.

Using the expensive perfume to anoint Jesus was an extravagant gift. But sometimes a tiny thank you, or a small token of appreciation, is not enough. Putting \$2 in the offering plate is not enough when we have so much more we can give and so much to give thanks for. Mary was overwhelmed with gratitude for Jesus' care and compassion. Jesus had brought her brother back from death to life. Mary watched Jesus heal the sick. She watched Jesus make whole those who were broken and cast aside. Jesus was Mary's friend. Washing his feet in Epsom salts was just not good enough. For all He had done for her, Mary had to give Jesus the best she had.

Yet, not everyone at dinner with Jesus, Lazarus, Mary, Martha, and the disciples, agreed with Mary using this expensive perfume to anoint Jesus while he was still alive. Judas had problems with this loving act of kindness. Judas, the treasure, the thief, and the betrayer, thought this perfume should have been sold and the money given to care for the poor. Now, the perfume was expensive. If sold it would have garnered the amount equal to a laborer's yearly wage. So at \$15 an hour, 40 hours a week, for 52 weeks--that would be \$31,200 in today's dollars. That's a lot of money for perfume!

As a social justice advocate and a financial planner, I kind of understand Judas' point. The poor could do a lot with \$31K. And \$31K would be a great start to an emergency fund for an organization that serves the least, the lost, the last, the left out and the locked up. But Jesus stopped Judas in his tracks with his drop the mic comment, ***you always have the poor.***

Jesus was not saying this to absolve us of responsibility to care for the poor. But to say every single day we have the opportunity and responsibility to care for those who are marginalized. There was nothing preventing Judas from using the funds he already had to serve the poor. If he wasn't stealing so much of the money, he would have had plenty to give to the poor. But, Judas wasn't really interested in serving the poor. Judas just liked the ***idea*** of helping the poor.

Sometimes we like the *idea* of helping others, we just don't want to take the time to do it. We like the *idea* of following the way of Jesus, as long as it doesn't cost us too much. We like the *idea* of being healthy; we just don't want to have to change our eating habits to get there. We like the *idea* of affordable housing for all as long as our taxes don't have to go up. We like the *idea* of being progressive Christians, we just don't want to read the bible.

Judas didn't care about the poor. He was interested in controlling things—the movement, the money, and most importantly Jesus. Frequently, those with money or those handling money think they run things.

Mary was probably not aware of all the symbolism associated with her anointing. At Jesus' last meal with his disciples, he in turn washed the feet of his disciples. The disciples bristled when Jesus approached them with towel wrapped around his waist and a basin of water, because the task of washing another's feet was the responsibility of menial servants. In their minds, Jesus was far above that. He was their teacher, their leader, the Messiah. But, Jesus modeled that if we want to be his followers, we are going to have to wash a few smelly, dusty, dirty feet. That my friends, is following the way of Jesus.

Mary prepared Jesus' body for what was before him—Jerusalem and then the cross. Preparation is a must if we want to succeed. Spring is just around the corner and gardeners are already preparing the soil for planting new crops. The opening day for major league baseball is Monday April 4. But there is a whole season of preparation or spring training that prepares players for the regular season. We do our best to prepare for retirement by saving enough money so we can live with grace and dignity when that season arrives. Preparation is usually the difference between success and failure—along with a fair amount of grace.

We prepare our mind for what lies ahead through reading and research. We prepare our body for what lies ahead through strenuous working outs, drinking water and getting enough sleep. But we also must prepare spiritually for what lies ahead—through prayer, by reading scripture, through worship, and personal time for meditation.

If life turns out the way we imagine it will, there is no problem. We give God the glory and keep stepping. But what throws us are the bumps in the road. The sicknesses we didn't count on; the failed relationships that are emotionally devastating; the wildfires, mudslides, and natural disasters that breach our sense of safety and security; and the layoffs and underemployment that cripple our finances. It is in these circumstances that our spiritual preparation becomes paramount. Our faith will see us through when our heart and mind can't find a way.

We don't know what the next season of our lives will bring, but we can prepare for whatever comes next. We can prepare knowing that whatever comes our way, God will walk with us. We serve a God that leads through rainbows and fiery pillars. God sees

what is up ahead and safely lead us on the journey. We are God's people and together we walk this journey called life.

Please stand as you are able and sing our closing hymn **#391 In the Midst of New Dimension**