

Jesus for his death. He was consoled and strengthened that this one person understood the cost he was about to pay.

In the stories of our faith, let's remember who is usually anointed. In the Old Testament, we read of three categories of people who are singled out for anointing.

1. **Kings** are anointed, kings like the great **King David**. The Lord chose David to be King over Israel because he saw into David's heart, and knew it was big enough and faithful enough to be King. Just like Jesus' heart was big enough and faithful enough.
2. **Priests** are anointed, priests like **Aaron**. Aaron was chosen by God for the role of leading the sacred rituals for the people that showed their devotion to God. Some of these rituals included the sacrifice of perfect animals on the altar of the Lord. Just like Jesus offered himself, his whole self, as a perfect sacrifice for all people.
3. **Prophets** are anointed, prophets like **Elisha**. Elisha was chosen by God to be a prophet for the people, and speak the Lord's words of truth to the people. Just like Jesus spoke profound truth, so powerful we are still learning from his words, still

being challenged by his words, still memorizing his words today.

By Mary of Bethany's rich perfume, Jesus has already been anointed as **King, Priest** and **Prophet** before he even gets to Jerusalem, the holy city.

This beautiful dramatic action on the part of Mary is the action of a person who deeply loves Jesus, and has the insight to understand what Jesus has been saying all along. It is not an insignificant side incident, but part of the grand sweep of the passion story. It is preparation for his death six days later.

It is affirmation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

He has been anointed King.

He has been anointed Priest.

He has been anointed Prophet.

The passion of Jesus Christ has begun.

"Prophet, Priest and King"

April 06th, 2025 — Selby United Church — Scripture John 12: 1 - 8

By Rev, Elaine Kellogg

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus. There they gave a dinner for him."

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, his final journey to that great, troubled, holy city. On his way there, he has stopped in to see his good friends, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. We know from the story that at least one of his disciples is there as well, Judas, so it is likely that there are other disciples with him too.

The meal they sit down to enjoy together is an unusual meal, for several reasons. First of all, there is Lazarus sitting at the table, Lazarus who is supposed to be dead. In fact, he had been dead. Through the grace and power of God, he had been brought back to life after he had already been buried in the tomb. Jesus had stood in front of that tomb, and called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus had walked out of that tomb, all decked out in his grave clothes, and presented himself back to the land of the living. (John 11:38-43)

In chapter 11 of John's gospel, it is recorded that all the bystanders who saw Lazarus walk out of the tomb had one main reaction to this unbelievable and frightening miracle – they believed in Jesus. They believed because of what they had seen with their very own eyes.

The Pharisees and the other religious rulers had a very different reaction. They were terribly upset. They were angry, confused, indignant and worried. Their reaction was not: "O how wonderful! This man must be the Messiah, or at least a prophet." They did not say, "We don't know who he is, or how this happened, but he is doing marvelous things. Let's see what wonderful thing he will do next."

No, they said, "How are we going to stop him?" They say to one another, "Here is a man performing all kinds of wondrous signs. (John 11:47-48) If he continues in this way, everyone will believe in him. If everyone believes in him, the Romans won't like it, and they will come with their swords and their army, and they will destroy us, our temple, and our nation. How are we going to stop Jesus, for we absolutely need to stop Jesus!"

So, the representatives of God call an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin. They come up with a solution – they are going to have him killed. They even have a sensible theological rationale for why killing Jesus makes sense. It is Caiaphas, the high priest that year, who says, "It is better for one man to die for the people, than that the whole nation perish."

It makes me shudder to think that these esteemed and educated men, members of the respected Sanhedrin, men who were supposed to be holy, decided it would please God to commit murder. Maybe they were only concerned about winning in a difficult political stand-off. For Jesus' 'crime' of defeating death in Lazarus, they decided to defeat Jesus himself by killing him.

Jesus heard about the plan to get rid of him by killing him, so for a while, he 'withdrew to a region near the wilderness, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples.' (John 11:54)

But his desire was for Jerusalem. He cannot stay away. His desire was to do his Father's will. He did not intend to run away and hide forever, for that would be the behaviour of a coward. He is brave and confident about his role, and knows what he needs to do. So, he comes out of hiding, and starts on his journey to Jerusalem for the Passover.

It is while he is on his way to Jerusalem that he stops to see his friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. At this meal they host for him, Jesus sits as a fugitive with a price on his head. Lazarus, of course, is also there, that man who had been raised from the dead. As I have already said, this was an unusual gathering. It is about to get even more unusual.

They are deep in the middle of their dinner with Jesus as the guest of honour, when in comes Mary, the sister who loves to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him teach. She comes right into the middle of the assembled guests, and walks right up to Jesus. She is carrying a bottle of expensive perfume. She breaks it open, pours it on Jesus' feet, and wipes his feet with her hair. The house is filled with the rich fragrance of the perfume.

The gathered guests stare in astonishment. What in the world is she doing? It is so strange, so outside the norm of polite, social behaviour, they don't know how to react.

It could easily be written off as a foolish, impetuous gesture by a silly girl.

But there is something so deliberate about it all.

Judas Iscariot is the first to speak up. He protests the waste of that perfume. It was worth so much, and the money could have been given to the poor. But Judas isn't really concerned about the poor; he was simply spouting the first thing that came to his mind. There was something so improper about what she was doing. It was so intrusive to their nice, polite, dinner party. Her loose hair was flowing around her shoulders, when it should have been neatly tied back. She was acting like a servant, when she ought to have been acting with modesty, covering her hair, staying in the background, letting the men have their dinner without

interruption. And, she was using expensive perfume, when a simple basin of water would have met the requirements of basic hospitality.

So, why does she do this? What is her point?

Perhaps the anointing with perfume is an extravagant expression of gratitude for bringing her brother back to life. That was a pretty magnificent thing Jesus had done.

Perhaps she simply loved Jesus with that unique kind of devotion that Jesus seemed to stir in many people. That alone would have been enough reason to anoint his feet with perfume.

It is Jesus himself who gives a different meaning to this anointing.

"Leave him alone," he says. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial."

To Jesus, she is anticipating his death and burial, and she is leaving the scent of the perfume as a sign on his body that she knows he is about to die. Three times Jesus had predicted that he was about to die, but Mary is the only person who believed him. When Jesus had predicted his coming death to his disciples, they either did not understand, were afraid to ask him any more questions, or refuted his prediction. Once, Simon Peter even took Jesus aside and rebuked him for predicting something so awful. It seems that of all the people around Jesus, only Mary of

Bethany believed him. Only Mary knew that Jesus' time with them was very short.

It seems that no one else at the table had a sense of just how little time Jesus had left. In less than a week, Jesus would be dead, and the time for eating at table with him would be over. The time for anointing his feet with perfume or water or anything at all would be over. The simple parables Jesus told, there would be no more. The miraculous healings, all finished. The controversial but wise teachings would be over. The kindnesses he lavished on the poorest among them, that would be no more.

Mary, alone of all Jesus' followers and friends, saw it all coming. While Lazarus and Martha and the disciples, and all the other people who got excited about Jesus, dined on fine food and dreamed about the day Jesus would drive the Romans out of Jerusalem, quiet Mary could see it was all about to end.

As it turns out, this is the only anointing of Jesus' body that takes place. As you will recall, the women who go to the tomb on Easter morning, ready to anoint Jesus' body with burial spices, could not complete the task, because there was no body. The resurrection interrupted their plans. Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet with sweet-smelling perfume was the only anointing he got.

This anointing at the "other" last supper, the last supper Jesus had with his dear friends in Bethany, helped to prepare