

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: A Woman Who Followed the Path of Christ

Lesson: John 12:1-8 NRSV

12 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ 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. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (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.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

(Slide 1) I spent the past week meditating on John 12:1-8. In biblical times, the name Mary was a very common name, so there were many Marys in the Bible. Mary in John 12:1-8 was the sister of Lazarus and Martha living in Bethany. By the way, Mary did an unconventional behavior. Let's read verse 3 together to see how she behaved: "Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair..." She took a very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. Generally, we spray perfume on clothes, wrists, or inner elbows to make it spread throughout the body. However, Mary poured that expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. People don't like to spray perfume on their feet because feet sometimes smell bad, and when sprayed on their feet, the scent doesn't spread well.

It's hard to understand her action, but her action seems to show devotion to Jesus. However, what she did next makes it even more difficult for us to understand. Not content with only wasting the expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, she also knelt down and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair.

(Slide 2) One of Evan's favorite hobbies these days is pouring water on the floor. Almost every day he pours water on the floor, on the table, on the sofa, or on the bed in those brief moments when we're looking elsewhere.

Then he looks at us very proudly. Then we wipe the water with paper towels with a sigh. If there is a lot of water on the floor and we feel that paper towels are not enough, we bring a towel and wipe the water. I never thought of wiping the water with my hair. Or I never even thought of wiping the water with my clothes. Mary's perfume was described as very expensive. Its value was three hundred denarii, which would be nearly a year's wages for a laborer. After googling, I learned that the average General Laborer salary in the United States is \$33,679. We can easily assume that Mary's perfume was worth about \$30,000.

Then, why did Mary do those things that we don't understand?

(Slide 3) It was six days before the Passover when Jesus came to the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So, Jesus was invited to Lazarus and his family. For reference, Jesus died on the cross on the Passover. Thus, the six days before the Passover indicated that Jesus' death was near. The home of Lazarus was full of joy because the dead Lazarus had been risen. Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and their servants made a feast for Jesus. Martha was described as a very hard worker. She was serving from the kitchen to the table. Although not described in the Gospel of John, other Gospels describe the place for the dinner as the house of Simon, a leper. So, Simon provided his house for Jesus, Martha served diligently, and Lazarus and Mary sat down at the table with Jesus, enjoying the feast, and listening to Jesus' words. The dinner was for Jesus, and the people there were enjoying the feast with Jesus. At that time, there was no system of worship unlike today. Thus, the place they gathered for Jesus was the church and the dinner with Jesus was the worship service. In other words, the people there were having a worship service with Jesus in Simon's house.

(Slide 4) When people were enjoying the party, Mary brought a pound of costly perfume. Then, she poured the perfume on Jesus' feet. And she wiped his feet with her hair. Mary loved to listen to Jesus. As she listened to him, her heart was touched. And she had a gut feeling that Jesus' death

was imminent. So she took that expensive perfume that she had cherished and kept, and poured it on Jesus' feet for his burial.

(Slide 5) There is another important meaning to this event, in which Mary poured her perfume on Jesus' feet. The highest part in the human body is hair. And the lowest part of the body is the feet. The fact that she poured her perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair was the confession of her faith that her knowledge, her experience, her reason and everything she had were nothing before Jesus. Also, the snake is often portrayed as Satan. According to Genesis, it says that the head of the snake that tempted Adam and Eve would be crushed. (Gen 3:15b) Although we were saved by Jesus Christ and became children of God, we are still vulnerable to sin and prone to sin. The depiction of Mary prostrate at Jesus' feet means that Jesus will punish all sins that interfere with our relationship with God.

Mary poured her expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, so the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. This shows what a true Christian looks like. True Christians have the fragrance of Christ in their lives. Mary was a Christian, and as a disciple of Jesus, Mary put the teachings of Jesus into practice by anointing his feet with perfume.

(Slide 6) While the people were enjoying the dinner with Jesus, one did not. He was Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' disciples, and he rebuked Mary, saying: "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" Judas's saying seemed very reasonable because, instead of pouring the perfume on Jesus' feet, she would be able to help many if she sold it. Those who heard Judas' reasonable saying began to murmur. By the way, Judas committed two sins when he rebuked Mary. First, the author of John says in verse 6 that Judas' intention was not with 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." In other words, Judas was a treasurer, but he used to steal the offering of the Christians. Acts 1:18 tells what Judas bought with the stolen money:

“Now this man (Judas) acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness...” The second one was Judas’ attitude of never accepting thoughts and opinions that are different from his own. I believe that the way of a mature Christian is not to follow one’s own will, but to follow God’s will. We must constantly ask God whether our current thoughts are ours or God-given. But, Judas rejected Mary because her thought and action were different from him.

(Slide 7) To Judas and the people who chatter, Jesus said: “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.” Jesus often told his disciples about his death, but they didn’t believe him, but rather denied it. Unlike the disciples, Mary truly listened to Jesus and believed what Jesus said, so she prepared the expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus’ feet for his funeral. And Jesus said that Mary was right saying: “You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Beloved: In biblical times many people followed Jesus but most of them followed him for their own desires. Some followed Jesus for their success, for their financial benefits, and for the amazing miracles. When Jesus was with them, he mentioned about his death many times, but his disciples did not accept Jesus' death and did not believe him. Rather, they denied it. However, unlike them, Mary humbly listened to Jesus, and believed, so she prepared the expensive perfume in advance for the funeral of Jesus, and poured it on his feet.

We are in the season of Lent. This period is a time to remember the sufferings of Jesus Christ and to prepare for the resurrection of Christ. We focus on our relationship with God during this time.

Beloved: How have you been preparing for the resurrection of Christ? I pray that we all, like Mary, humbly accept, believe, and prepare for the resurrection of Christ, so that our lives may be filled with the fragrance of Christ. Amen.