

“PERFUME PROPHETESS”

Mark 14:1-11

2018 Lenten Series - His Last Week

March 11, 2018

¹ Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.

² "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."

³ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴ Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?"

⁵ It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶ "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.

⁹ I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

¹¹ They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Mark 14:1-11 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION:

Just a quick review of Jesus' last week to this point:

- Monday - Jesus entered the Temple and disrupted the routine
- Tuesday - Jesus spent the day at the Temple, confronting the elders, scribe and priests

**Today, we look at the events that happened on Wednesday . . .
. . . two days before the Passover meal.**

**And the first thing we notice in this particular piece of scripture is that Mark has used another of his "framed units" to draw out attention to a very important event -
- and to interpret that event for us.**

**A "framed unit" is a story that has been "sandwiched" between two other pieces of scripture –
so what is in the middle interprets what is on both ends
and what is on both ends interprets what is in the middle.**

In Mark 14:1-2 -

- we see that the priests, scribes and elders were looking for some sort of covert way to arrest Jesus.

**They couldn't do so openly –
the risk was too great that the crowd might turn against them.**

**What they needed was to catch Jesus away from the crowd.
To do that, they needed someone close to Jesus
who would tell them where Jesus might be most vulnerable.
A traitor.**

**In Mark 14:3-9, Mark tells us of the actions of an unnamed woman;
actions which *seem* to be disconnected to the rest of the story**

**In Mark 14:10-11 we see the advent of a traitor –
Judas, one of the 12 disciples closest to Jesus
who, for reason not told to us, decides to betray Jesus**

Now, let's see how all of this fits together.

NEED FOR A TRAITOR:

**In every organization -
in every organized group of people –
there is an immutable law of self-preservation.**

**The technical term is the *Iron Law of Oligarchy* –
simply stated, the first law of any organization
is the perpetuation of the institution.**

**The most important aspect of *this* church
is that it *must* survive!**

**First of all,
it is a characteristic of almost *every* church.
Just about the time the church opens its doors
and makes the first payment on its mortgage -
- the *survival* of that church
becomes the most important thing on the agenda.**

**We don't make that decision because we are evil people,
we are flawed, sinful human beings.
We are *not* perfect.
We *do* make mistakes.**

**We are just hard-wired with the thought:
“I must destroy before I am destroyed.”**

**And that same thought extends to the church -
- we must protect the church *at all costs!***

**And the elders, scribes and priests were thinking the same thing:
“We must arrest this Jesus by whatever means and destroy Him.”
If we do nothing - we shall become nothing.
If order is lost - so am I,
If I lose my power - then I lose my identity.**

**It was the inevitable - unavoidable - consequence
of the path Jesus had chosen.**

**To confront Roman imperial power with its violence -
- to confront high-priestly collaboration with its injustice
- these actions would lead to a major confrontation
- and it was inevitable the elders and priests would choose
to get rid of Jesus rather than lose control
and be forced to change.**

**Jesus had done His best to prepare the disciples
for this inevitable consequence –
he had tried to teach them the meaning of the confrontation
and to prepare them for His inevitable death.**

**In every situation in which Jesus sought to get the disciples to see
the truth -
- there was a prophecy by Jesus
then a reaction by the disciples
and finally and a response.**

Take a look at Mark 8:31-38.

First, there is the prophecy of Jesus -

31 [Jesus] then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Then reaction of the disciples -

32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Finally, there is the response of Jesus -

33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

There are other examples -

one is found in Mark 9:31-37,

Another is found in Mark 10:33-45.

Each example follows the same formula:

**Jesus tells the disciples what is about to happen -
they react (usually negatively because of unbelief)
and Jesus then responds to them.**

ACTIONS OF A FAITHFUL WOMAN:

At this point,

**Mark rather unexpectedly introduces a story
that doesn't seem to fit what is going on.**

While eating a meal,

**an unnamed woman enters the room,
with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume
which she breaks open and pours on Jesus' head.**

The cost of the perfume is said to be equal to a year's wages!

It is a wasteful and extravagant act!

And the disciples rebuked her sharply!

But Jesus comes to her defense:

⁶ "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me." ⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Jesus said:

"She did what she could . . . what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

**What was so valuable about what this woman *did*?
the cost of the gift?**

**If that were true,
it would imply we could *bribe* God with our gifts and tithes.
God would be influenced by our giving.**

**It would indicate that we could be blessed
in direct proportion to what we give.
That may be what the television evangelists peddle -
- but it is *not* true!**

**God loves us - period!
God's love for us has nothing to do
with the *value* of what we give!**

**Most likely,
the disciples were offended by such an extravagant act
because it produced nothing.
It accomplished nothing –
- it fed no poor**

- it served no need
- it simply seemed to be wasteful

There is another explanation - one we overlook.

Maybe it was an extravagantly loving thing to do

- motivated by the love the woman obviously had for Jesus.

There are those of us who love Jesus just as much

but we don't have nearly as much to give.

Does that mean *our* love is worth less than hers?

Surely not!

Or, maybe Jesus was impressed because this woman *acted!*

Alone among all the disciples,

she *understood* what Jesus had been teaching.

And she *acted* on her belief!

Aaaahhh . . .

Mark is beginning to make sense!

Judas had a belief –

that what Jesus was doing was wrong

and Judas acted.

The unnamed woman also had a belief-

that *indeed* Jesus *was* going to be killed

- and she acted on that belief!

“She did what she could.”

And the story abruptly shifts back to Judas.

ACTIONS OF A TRAITOR:

Mark does not give us a reason Judas acted.

Mark just doesn't bother with the *motive*.

**In our humanity,
we can't live with the unanswered question:
Why did he do it?**

**Mark, in his wisdom, doesn't speculate on a reason.
Instead, Mark presents the act without mention of the causes.**

**Because Mark leaves us without a *reason* for Judas' sin -
- and the lack of a reason causes us to ask:
Does the motive behind a sin -
- the rationale, the reasons for a sin -
- *ever* justify the sin?**

**The motives, the rationale behind any sin
could *never* make it less of a sin!**

**I am responsible for the sins I commit!
All of them!
If I did it - I am responsible for the sin!
Period!**

**God is neither interested in the motive -
- nor is God willing to accept an excuse.**

**So, Mark simply side-steps the whole issue
of what might have been Judas' motive for such a sin.**

**The bottom line for Mark -
- Judas acted on his belief.
The unnamed woman acted on her belief.**

**And then we begin to realize what Mark is saying . . .
 . . . we must *all* make decisions about what we believe -
 or what we are unwilling to believe -
 and then we allow that belief to motivate us to act.**

CONCLUSION:

**Almost by accident,
 - although in matters of faith and holiness
 there are *no* accidents! -
 - Judas becomes the tool
 used by the chief priests, elders and scribes
 to get rid of the rebellious and dangerous Jesus.**

**Judas becomes the friend who is willing to act like an enemy.
 Judas becomes the traitor.**

Judas betrayed Jesus - the man.

**And before we quickly judge Judas . . .
 . . . ask yourself this:
 Do we not do the exact same thing
 when we deny the sovereignty of Jesus?**

**We say, “Jesus is lord.”
 But we seldom live as though we believe that.
 And failure to live our belief is . . . sin, betrayal.**

**Every Sunday,
 we reaffirm our faith together as we say some form of:
 “I believe that Jesus is the Christ,
 Son of the Living God -
 - and I seek to follow Him
 as my Lord and Savior.”**

We say it . . . but do we *really* believe it?

**Is our belief strong enough
to motivate us to *act*?**

We are faced with yet another choice here this morning.

To choose *what* we believe . . .

. . . and then to choose whether or not we will *act* on our belief.