

## Sunday Lesson – April 3, 2022

### GOSPEL: John 12: 1-8

*"Anointing His feet"*

#### Context

"All four Gospels tell this or a similar story. Details vary in the four accounts, Matthew and Mark being similar to each other and also to John's account (the most significant difference being that, in Matthew and Mark, the woman anoints Jesus' head and in John anoints Jesus' feet).

Luke's account is distinctive, coming earlier in the Gospel, taking place at the home of a Pharisee, and involving a sinful woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, and anoints them with ointment.

Scholars believe that there might be two separate incidents behind these accounts, one as described by Matthew, Mark, and John, and the other by as described by Luke. Luke uses Mark as one of his primary sources, so it seems likely that he merges Mark's account with material from a second source." (Excerpts from [sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/new-testament-john-12-1-8/](http://sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/new-testament-john-12-1-8/))

#### Insight

"Both Matthew and Mark's accounts emphasize the prophetic significance of the anointing of Jesus, alluding to His death and burial. There may also be an implication of Jesus' kingship, since, in the Old Testament, the anointing of the head was often associated with the dedication of kings.

In Luke's account of a similar, yet different, instance, Jesus uses the occasion of being anointed to tell a parable about forgiveness. About a year before His death, Jesus was dining in the home of Simon the Pharisee, who had arrogantly neglected to extend the customary respect and hospitality to his guest,



while a sinful woman anoints Jesus' feet, lavishing her love and gratefulness upon Jesus.

In each case, the woman's actions signal more than she knows. But, although she may not fully comprehend the messianic significance of her anointing, each woman had come to appreciate Christ's worth more than anyone else at the table. Jesus Christ is God's anointed Messiah. The word *Messiah* means "anointed one" and derives directly from the Hebrew word for "anointed." *Christ* comes from the Greek word *Christos*, also meaning "anointed one." Thus, *Christ* is the Greek equivalent to *Messiah*. When Jesus receives the Holy Spirit at His baptism, He is "anointed" by God in preparation for His life's work. On three separate occasions, Jesus is anointed with fragrant ointment in His work as the Savior, the King of heaven who was in preparation to die to save His people." (Excerpts from [gotquestions.org/Jesus-anointed.html](http://gotquestions.org/Jesus-anointed.html))

#### Gospel Reading

"Six days before Passover, Jesus entered Bethany where Lazarus, so recently raised from the dead, was living. Lazarus and his sisters invited Jesus to dinner at their home. Martha served. Lazarus was one of those sitting at the table with them. Mary came in with a jar of very expensive aromatic oils, anointed and massaged Jesus' feet, and then wiped them with her hair. The fragrance of the oils filled the house. Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, even then getting ready to betray him, said, "Why wasn't this oil sold and the money given to the poor? It would have easily brought three hundred silver pieces." He said this not because he cared two cents about the poor but because he was a thief. He was in charge of their common funds, but also embezzled them. Jesus said, "Let her alone. She's anticipating and honoring the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you. You don't always have me." The Message

## What It Could Mean?

“The activity of Mary—though described in only one verse—is the action around which the scene revolves. On the one hand, her act is intimate (she wipes Jesus’ feet with her own hair). Only this Gospel depicts one of Jesus’s cherished friends as the anointer (compare Luke’s parallel!). Her activity also touches other senses because the anointing action is a reminder that death—a description found only in John—touches even the nostrils (“The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume”).

The presence of Lazarus is also a consistent reminder of death’s presence. His continuation within the story was a reminder of Jesus’ power over death, that death would not have the last word. Furthermore, as long as Lazarus remains in these scenes—an emphasis only in the Gospel of John—the religious leaders are mindful of the popularity (and power) of Jesus. Even the resurrected Lazarus has a bounty on his head.

The relative lack of references to the “poor” within the fourth Gospel (similar to Mark’s Gospel) may suggest for some interpreters that the poor was not a major theme within John. Since poverty was everywhere, the narratives of that world did not need to discuss its presence. Nevertheless, this is not really a story about treatment of the poor but about preparation for death, preparation for Jesus’ death (as Mary noticed).

Lent is a time to remember that **death** is always in the air. To die is part of what it means to be human. Time within a pandemic is an unfortunate daily reminder of our collective human frailty. When death strikes close to home, most are not fully prepared for the passing of loved ones. Death has a smell and death provides a memory of the loved ones lost. Yet John 12 is a reminder that death will not have the final word. Lazarus is a reminder of that promise, even though his human body will die again. The ointment is a reminder of that promise. The people who gathered for another meal are a reminder of that

promise. The prepared, anointed body of Jesus, of course, is the ultimate reminder of that promise. Death will not have the final word. During the season of Lent, we remember that death will not have the final word.

**How should the dead affect the living?** Isn’t that the purpose of Lent—to reflect on the ultimate death (Jesus’ own) and the significance for the lives, the commitments, the activities, the practices of the living? For what are we willing to sacrifice time, money, efforts? Do we place the struggles of people around us at the center of our attention? Does the nearness of death—for those who live on the fringes of our society, for those in our parishes who are physically near the end of their lives, for those reflecting on Jesus’s sacrifice—make us a bit more mindful of human frailty and, perhaps, encourage us to act on behalf of others?” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org, Revised Common Lectionary, by Emerson Powery*)

## Readings for Further Study

- [Matthew 26: 6-13; Mark 14: 3-9; Luke 7: 36-50](#) Other gospel versions of Mary anointing Jesus
- [1 Samuel 9:15 – 10:1; 16: 12-13; 1 Kings 1: 38-40](#) Old Testament anointing associated with the dedication of kings

## Thought for the Day

“And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” ~ *2 Corinthians 1: 21-22*

## A Prayer

Creator God, you prepare a new way in the wilderness, and your grace waters our desert. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love given to all through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**