

The readings for Sunday, April 7, 2019:

First Reading: Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm: Psalm 126

Second Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14

Gospel: John 12:1-8

I've always had some amount of trouble with this Gospel; I suspect it's because I would have been that disciple who said, "Just think what we could have done with the money that went to buy that expensive oil. Doesn't Jesus know the electric bill is due? We could have helped the poor. And she went and poured it all over his feet!"

I know that traditionally we use this Gospel lesson to make us think forward a few weeks to Good Friday, when Jesus' dead body will be anointed with funeral oils. But there's still something about this Gospel that makes me restless.

Perhaps it is Jesus saying, "The poor you will always have with you." I'm uneasy with the way so many people through the centuries have used this line to justify their unwillingness to work to eradicate poverty. A shrug of the shoulders, that verse out of context, and poof, we don't have to worry about our riches.

I've been trying to sit with this passage in a different context, in the context of the whole Gospel of John. Jesus says that the poor we'll always have with us, but we won't always have Jesus (at least not in human form). I'm trying to see it as Jesus telling us that we must treasure the moments in life that are sweet. Did Jesus know what was about to happen to him? Different theologians would give you different answers, but even if Jesus didn't know all the particulars of his upcoming execution, he must have known that he was stirring up all sorts of worldly trouble for himself. He must have known that he wouldn't have had many more of these occasions to sit and savor a meal.

I'm sure he's also speaking towards our impulse towards anger and self-righteousness. I can criticize the decisions of others in how they spend their money and what they should be spending their money on ("Imagine. She calls herself a Christian and she goes to get her nails done. She could do them herself at home and send the money she would have spent to Habitat for Humanity"). It's not always easy for me to know how to allocate my resources of time, treasure, and energy.

Truth be told, I find it easier to work on many a spiritual discipline than to sit and savor a meal with those whom I love, the ones, whom, like Jesus, I won't always have with me. I find it frighteningly easy to slide into the behavior of the disciples, that self-righteousness which precludes being able to enjoy a meal together.

In these days that feel increasingly hectic, let us remember to take time to focus on what's truly important. Let us put aside the anger and judgment that can make it so hard to live in community. Let us take the time that it takes to break bread together.