

Luke 22:14 - 23:56

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

"You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

"Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me."

He said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "No, not a thing." He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled." They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." He replied, "It is enough."

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing,

remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” [[Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]] When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?” They kept heaping many other insults on him.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son

of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!"

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people

followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."]] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come

with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.”*

Leave Her Alone - April 3, 2022

John 12:1-8

What an extraordinary gift! What an extravagant gift! What a ridiculous gift! All these are potential reactions to the gift Mary gave to Jesus. As we learned from today's gospel reading, Mary poured expensive perfume all over Jesus, even wiping his feet with her hair. She was honoring her friend, that man who brought her brother back to life. She was worshipping her Lord and Savior.

How dare she? I mean really, what business did Mary have doing such a thing? We learn that Mary pours a jar of perfume that cost a year's wages! How was that possible? I mean scripture doesn't tell us much about Mary, her sister Martha, and her brother Lazarus. Perhaps they were rich, perhaps not. We don't really know the family finances. Nevertheless, even if you are wealthy, you would never break a bottle of Chanel No 5 and pour the contents over someone all at once! Even if the money didn't matter, we still know that it's too much of a good thing. I don't know much about perfume, but I do know that it's used sparingly. A little goes a long way. You're certainly not supposed to be overpowered by perfume, just a hint of scent is enough.

So the word extraordinary is quite appropriate in terms of describing what Mary did for Jesus. Pouring out the perfume is something nobody has done or will do ever. It was truly a gift without comparison.

No doubt the gift was extravagant. For almost all of us, the only thing we own that represents a year's wages or more is our homes. Most of us live in houses that cost considerably more than what we earn. Nothing we possess even comes close. Why would she do such a thing? Yes, she was grateful that Jesus was her friend. Yes, she was grateful that she raised Lazarus her brother from the dead. Nonetheless, wasn't the perfume simply over the top? Wasn't it way too much of a good thing?

Certainly Judas thought so. Now the scripture points out that Judas thought Mary's gift was ridiculous. He pointed out that if Mary really wanted to do something useful, the perfume should have been sold and the money given to poor people. Of course, the text reminds us that Judas was a thief and would probably have stolen some of the proceeds from the sale of the perfume. We also learn Judas was shortly going to betray Jesus. Yet Judas' hypocrisy notwithstanding, he did have a point. A year's wages was obviously a good sum of money could indeed be used to help people. Is breaking a jar of perfume over Jesus truly the best way to honor him?

Mary was criticized for how she chose to honor Jesus and in response to her critics, Jesus told everyone to leave her alone. In short, if Jesus had no problems with Mary's gift to him, nobody else should have a problem, either.

But Lord, we might say, is Mary's example the one you want us to follow? If that is what you want, well, following you seems to be a very expensive hobby. I mean, a couple dollars here, a couple dollars there, that's fine. But now we're talking real money and that is just way too much.

And yet, is it? Is what Mary did for Jesus so outrageous, so out of line? Consider what Jesus did for Mary. We start with Jesus raising her brother Lazarus from the dead. Something totally unheard of. We don't know how, we don't know why, but Jesus just did it and that's all that matters.

Jesus did more for Mary. When Jesus was in the town of Bethany where Mary lived, he set up shop in Mary and her sister Martha's house. You might recall that as Jesus was preparing to teach the people at Mary's house, Mary sat down to be with Jesus and the others who were there to listen to him. Martha, on the other hand, busied herself with housekeeping and other chores. Martha was so busy, in fact, that she didn't have time to even listen to Jesus. Martha even complained to Jesus that Mary was being lazy by not helping her. But to Martha's surprise, Jesus told Martha that Mary had made the better choice by sitting down to listen to Jesus speak. No question that Jesus appreciated Martha and her work. Nevertheless, Mary made the better choice. Jesus affirmed Mary and her desire to hear Jesus speak.

Finally, it is possible that the Mary in today's story is Mary Magdalene, the woman Jesus rescued from certain death. Mary Magdalene was the one hauled before Jesus and Jesus was told she was committing adultery. The crowd wanted to stone her to death because that was the traditional punishment for adulterers. If you recall the story, Jesus began writing in the dirt at his feet and declared that the one who had no sin could cast the first stone at Mary. The crowd melted away and Jesus was left with only Mary. Some have speculated that Jesus was writing the names of all the men in the crowd who had committed adultery and the men, upon seeing their names, were forced to remember their own sin and guilt and left.

So Jesus saved Mary's life, save her brother's life, and even stood up for her in front of her sister. With all that Jesus had done for her, could you possibly agree that Mary was very justified in pouring expensive perfume all over Jesus? You might say she was thanking Jesus only partially.

Jesus did a lot for Mary and Mary responded to Jesus with a very expensive gift.

The question for us should therefore be, how do we respond to Jesus?

Jesus did so much for Mary and her family. Very obvious things of which many people were aware. We might even say that if Mary had done nothing for Jesus, she would have been guilty of ingratitude.

OK, that's fine for Mary, but what about you and me? Has Jesus done as much for us as he did for Mary? Should we be responding to Jesus with equal extravagance, and equal foolishness?

I guess that depends, doesn't it? Perhaps you thought I'd just say, "Yes, of course" or "No, it's not necessary."

But really, what do you think of Jesus? Who do you think he is? What do you think his life and ministry is about? Really, why is Jesus here and what did he come to do for you?

Obviously this is a very individual and personal question. I would say that how we answer the question may even change over time. We know and God knows that our relationship changes. It gets close and then it fades. Our faith is strong sometimes and sometimes it is almost non-existent.

Now none of us has witnessed our dead brothers being raised to life — or have we? Friends, one of the phrases we repeat every week is that in Jesus we have new life. When we baptize, we speak of our lives being made new as we emerge from the waters. When we have communion, we speak of the bread and the cup filling us with the spirit of Christ, renewing in us the life-giving spirit that is the essence of Jesus.

In fact, can we not say that when we look at it the right way, resurrection is not just something that happened to one man a long time ago. Instead resurrection, in other words, new life from death, is actually something that happens all the time. If we really think about it, we can remember people whose lives have been transformed and restored for no apparent reason. I personally can think of a number of relationships that I thought were dead that suddenly, unexpectedly, came back to life. I don't know how and I don't know why, but they did.

In short, there is much more to resurrection than simply the physical transformation of our bodies. Resurrection can happen equally, or even more frequently, to our minds and our spirits. For Mary, it was unquestionably wonderful to see her brother alive once more. But is that experience any greater or more meaningful than to witness the transformation of the people closest to us? Watching new life and new possibilities come to relationships we thought were dead? Jesus conquers death in all its forms, not merely the physical death of our bodies.

When we give, whether to the church or some other cause, don't we tend to give with one eye on the good we are going but the other eye on our bank account? We tell ourselves we must be generous, but we must also be prudent. But Mary gave without counting the cost. She did not hesitate pouring that entire jar of perfume over Jesus. I doubt she thought even one second about the monetary value

that perfume represented. Instead, Mary shared one of her most valued possessions with the man that literally saved her life. How do you put a price on that?

Indeed. Mary, perhaps more than most, knew exactly what Jesus did for her personally. She was there when Jesus made all the men who wanted to kill her go away. She was there when Jesus told her sister to mind her own business.

Maybe for us it is not so obvious on how Jesus works in our lives. Maybe we don't sense any kind of nearness or closeness with Jesus. Maybe for us Jesus is this guy we wave at periodically but don't see much use for him otherwise.

But have we taken the time to honestly reflect on who Jesus is and what he has done for us? It is all too easy to take Jesus and his teachings for granted. The fact is that many of Jesus' ideas are so baked into our laws and ways of thinking that we forget that so many of the attitudes we have — ideas about justice, equality, how the poor should be treated. These are rooted in Jesus. His influence on our lives cannot be underestimated. Even so-called secular nations that downplay the role of church and religion espouse policies that affirm the dignity of people and ensure a minimum standard of living to all people. In short, Jesus' example and influence on our lives is far more pervasive than we may admit. In 2022, we certainly fall way short of what Jesus expects of the world. On the other hand, we at least have incorporated many of his ideas into our laws.

What I'm saying is that Jesus has transformed humanity for the better. Every advance in human rights that has occurred over the centuries has been rooted in the teachings of Jesus. While we have a long way to go, none of us, at least in this room, would ever go back to the way things were.

So if we really believe that Jesus has made the world a better place, why shouldn't be extravagant toward him? Why should we not recognize that Jesus means much, much more to us than we can realize and that giving in his name truly has no price. Indeed, it is worth everything, just as Mary understood.

Today we gather around this table to join Jesus for the supper, the banquet, he gave for us. In the bread and the cup, the body and the blood, let us appreciate once again the sacrifice he made so we can glimpse what humanity can and should be. Let us remember how Mary did all she could to honor Jesus in both what he did for her and what he was about to do for all of us.

No wonder Jesus told the crowd to leave her alone! She knew exactly what she was doing.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.