

Sermon Benedictus 28/3/15  
Mark 14:1-11

There is growing tension in our reading. It begins with chief priests and the scribes wanting to kill Jesus, but not to make a scene, "to arrest him by stealth and kill him". The authorities want to avoid political intervention, just to get rid of him quietly. He is a nuisance, a danger to the status quo, the easy relationship with the Romans allowing them their religious practices. They want to get rid of him but they fear riots if they openly seize him during the Passover festivities. Mark seems to imply that Jesus and the reign of God are intimately connected with the festival of Passover and its theme of liberation. <sup>1</sup>

Then at the end of the passage, Judas, offers to betray Jesus to them.

Mark set things up nicely. This short passage hints at it all, and it is bracketed by Jesus death. It is at the beginning of the Passion Narrative in Mark's Gospel.

Meanwhile, in the centre of the passage, Jesus is not far away, in Bethany, having a meal with friends, yet even here there is tension, dis-ease..

It is a homely scene, just a day's walk from Jerusalem. We are at the home of Simon the leper. Simon the leper? Now there's a story in that, I'm sure. He is a leper? He was a leper? I imagine that he is one of the ones that Jesus has healed. Okay, so Jesus is in the home of someone who is whole, who was unclean but now is restored to fellowship. Sounds right. Here is a clear symbol of his ministry.

He and his mates are eating dinner. He is in a place which points to his ministry and why he is here, to heal and restore. He is in a place which demonstrates why he is a threat.

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<sup>1</sup>p343 Women in Scripture

A woman, unnamed, breaks into the cosy tension with an outrageous perfumed costly act. The perfume is worth a year's wages. She anoints his head. Kings are anointed thus. We might remember Samuel anointing Saul, then David as king, as well as Nathan anointing Solomon. Jesus, however, thinks of his impending death. We might also remember the women coming to the tomb on Easter morning to anoint the already anointed, dead Jesus.

"She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial." He says. 'She has done a work of mercy, a charity, the equivalent of giving to the poor', he implies. Tobit 1:16-17 lists feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and burying the dead together as works of mercy. Jesus' body is buried by the pious and charitable Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:42-45) This interpretation of Jesus of the act of anointing, changes the woman's prophetic designation of Jesus as Messiah, 'anointed one', into a prophetic prediction of his death.<sup>2</sup>

That is a radical thing to say, she is foretelling his death. It forces his friends to face facts. There is danger here, loss, and not only the loss of Jesus, but loss of a dream for some, and this act and Jesus comments, tip Lazarus to betray him.

What Dangerous stuff!

The grumblers, then Jesus, speak of the poor. Who are they to this group? Who are the poor to us, the ones we always have with us? Do they even figure in our imagination, and action? Except when we criticise others.

'But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her.'.. Jesus words show he sees her act as equivalent to caring for the poor!

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

Would I have been with them? Embarrassed, angry, covering my discomfort by criticising? Probably.

Jesus says "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

There are so many layers in this story. She anoints his head with costly nard. What is going on for her here? What is going on for Jesus? We do not hear her voice, but Jesus interprets the event to those who are cross. We hear of death, we hear of the disaffected, the silent, the disenchanted and we turn our eyes to Jesus as he begins the Holy Week and Easter journey.

Where do we sit in this narrative?

Are we with the woman, without a name, without words, acting prophetically to show our love, to show more perhaps than we even imagined?

Are we with those who want to kill Jesus, to kill all that he stands for? To kill the church and its problems?

Or are we with Judas, disaffected, willing to betray the one we loved because our dream has not been fulfilled?

Or are we a bystander, someone who looks on without commitment?

Do you sit, bored, unaffected, or tied up in your own unfolding tragedy, unable to lift your eyes to engage?

We too are on the cusp of Holy Week and Easter. Tomorrow is Palm Sunday when many will stand up at the refugee rally. Then the week continues with the journey to the cross and beyond. It is a difficult time for me, a time of raw emotion, as I walk day by day with Jesus, meditate and reflect.

Then comes Maundy Thursday, a day of eating and drinking and silent prayer; a day when Jesus washes feet, and breaks bread and drinks wine, a day when Jesus is betrayed by a friend.

Then, Good Friday: the murder, the death of this one, Jesus, and I remember all the people throughout the ages who have been murdered for political reasons. I remember those who are still

imprisoned, still awaiting crucifixion, death by lethal injection, death by hanging, by knife wounds, by gunshot.

On Saturday, there is the silent time, the empty time. Has God abandoned us? There is silence in the heart of God, in great pain and grief.

Then early Sunday morning there is the lighting of the new fire the renewal of hope, the risen Christ - unimaginable, puzzling, prophetic, challenging, like the movement from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly, from the darkness of the tomb/womb to light and the rolled away stone. Christianity is born.

Many of us want to rush to Sunday, without the tension, the waiting, the tragedy, but that is not how it is. We have to wait, and walk step by step. It's very hard to wait, let me tell you. It is where I am now, waiting. And people ask, "Are you there yet? Have you applied for jobs? Do you know what you are doing?" I reply, "I am waiting, I am resting, I am in transition, I am trusting, or at least trying to trust in God." That is the most difficult and threatening of all, waiting.

Having seen this overview of the coming week, we come back to this evening's story of politics and prophecy, of disappointment and love, of being present and running away.

Where are you in this story? I invite you to be present, to stay here in this room, in this space with the woman, with Jesus, to watch and to wait, to engage as the week unfolds, to journey day by day, present, noticing, meditating, praying, keeping your eyes open for symbolic acts of prophecy, open to being caught off guard, open to giving, and receiving.

Wonderful Australian poetic prophet, 'Michael Leunig's vision of humanity reveals the mystical within the commonplace- a teapot, a duck, an empty path, a sunrise. For him there are many messages to be found within the biblical Easter story.

Leunig has expressed that everyone shall be crucified and broken like Christ, but that which is Christ like in people shall rise again to love and create.

He says "Easter is reflecting upon suffering for one thing, but it also reflects upon Jesus and his non compliance in the face of great authority where he holds to his truth."<sup>3</sup>

In her poem 'In the Midst of the Company', Janet Morley powerfully imagines Mark's telling of today's gospel from Jesus' perspective. I offer it to you, to sit with:

In the midst of the company I sat alone,  
and the hand of death took hold of me;  
I was cold with secrecy,  
and my God was far away.  
For this fear did my mother conceive me,  
and to seek this pain did I come forth?  
Did her womb nourish me for the dust,  
or her breasts, for me to drink bitterness?  
O that my beloved would hold me  
and gather me in her arms;  
that the darkness of God might comfort me,  
that this cup might pass me by.  
I was desolate, and she came to me;  
when there was neither hope nor help for pain  
she was at my side;  
in the shadow of the grave she has restored me.  
My cup was spilling with betrayal,  
but she has filled it with wine;  
my face was wet with fear,  
but she has anointed me with oil,  
and my hair is damp with myrrh.  
The scent of her love surrounds me;  
it is more than I can bear.  
She has touched me with authority;  
in her hands I find strength.  
For she acts on behalf of the broken,

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/03/28/3726080.htm>

and her silence is the voice of the unheard.  
Though many murmur against her, I will praise her;  
and in the name of the unremembered,  
I will remember her.

Susanna Pain