

Sermon preached by Rev. Tom Halls at the healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney on Wednesday 17th January 2007. Reading: John 11:45 -12:12
Topic: "New Love"

After the resurrection of Lazarus Jesus moved out of public view. That was his usual pattern. Following miracles he retreated from the crowds so that they would have their faith, not in the event, but in his word. As well, religious power-brokers planned to kill him [11:53]. They demanded information about his whereabouts [11:57]. He could not walk openly for fear of being mobbed by crowds or murdered by priests. He retreated to a "wilderness near the city of Ephraim" [11:54] and the question buzzing around Jerusalem's was: "**Will he come to the feast?**" [11:56]

1 THE GENEROSITY LOVE EXPRESSES [12:1-3]

The scene was set for further revelation. Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was raised [12:1] and now lived again with his sisters Martha and Mary [11:1]. The countdown to the Passover Feast at Jerusalem was under way; just 6 days to go. Imagine the flurry of preparation and the excitement of children. A meal was given in Jesus' honour [12:2]. Martha served and Lazarus was there; available for all to see / touch / hear / eat with. He had not been spirited away as might be the case when charlatans had been at work. Mary anointed Jesus for burial with perfume [12:3] symbolically. He was still alive.

The anointing was *expensive* pure nard worth about a year's wages "300 denarii" [12:5] *extravagant* about half a litre of perfume was used [Phew!], so that the air filled with the aroma. This is the Luxury of love. A good example of the service and giving to support Gospel outreach which should be evident among those who have the new life the Risen Jesus gives. *on the feet*. This is an interesting focus. Kings are anointed on the head. So are those seeking healing here tonight. Mary was acknowledging the purpose. Jesus had: to bring news of new life for those dying because of sin's destruction. "How beautiful are the feet of him who preaches good news"[Isaiah 52:7]. The same symbolism was there when Jesus washed the disciples' feet at the last supper [John 13:5-14]; acknowledging their call to bring news of life through faith in Him.

The feet of the King is the place of submission. Seeking healing for his daughter, the synagogue leader Jairus fell down at Jesus' feet to make his request. [Mark 5:22] Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair [crowning glory] This was an expensive, extravagant gesture of love.

2 THE FALSEHOOD MEANNESS EXHIBITS [12:4-6]

Judas Iscariot's name is a synonym for evil. Yet he is described as, "one of the disciples". It is possible to be in the company of Jesus' people and not have the gift of life from him. Judas is also described as the one, "who would hand him over (betray)" [12:4]. This is the man who rebuked Mary for waste protesting that the nard could have been sold, and the funds realised from the sale given to the poor. [12:5] The Gospel writer explains that Judas was "not concerned for the poor". [12:6] He was a churchman, but he was a crook. His moral indignation was a cover for deceit. He pilfered from the purse. Beware of religious indignation which is a covering for spiritual inadequacy.

3 THE OPPORTUNITY NEED EXPOSES [12:7-8]

[i] Jesus' death requires anointing and recognition of his purpose.

He stooped down from Heaven's glory to become one of us and to die for us on the Cross. He will go into the tomb as surely as Lazarus came out of it. Mary took the opportunity

to acknowledge this great purpose unfolding in their day. Jesus supported her and condemned the religious hypocrite. "Leave her alone!" [12:7] Don't tamper with love, traitor! "Let her keep the day of my burial"; a *meaningful ritual*.

[i] Another principle emerged.

"You always have the poor with you". [12:8] The responsibility to care for them is no excuse for meanness now. You can help the poor whenever you wish, but "you will not always have me with you". Opportunity is knocking! My betrayal and burial are imminent. [12:4, 7] Anoint me now, recognising my purpose in the world. Identify with this good work.

4 THE RESPONSES TRUTH EVOKES [12:9-12]

[i] A large crowd of Jews

They came to see not only Jesus, but Lazarus raised to life. [12:9] Word has gone out that the dead man is walking again.

[ii] Religious power-brokers ["Chief Priests"]

These men conspired to kill Lazarus as well as Jesus. [12:10] What had poor Lazarus done, other than come from death to life? Why blame him? Political expediency said, hide the facts and destroy the faith, just as some religious scholars attempt to do in our day. Satan and his followers oppose sermons and Bible study, preferring to offer exercises in serendipity, which seek to play on the emotions, rather than convicting the mind.

[iii] Ordinary people

John notes that "many believed because of Lazarus". [12:11] What else could they do? For them it was simple cause and effect. Thanksgiving seemed to be the appropriate response to blessing. Faced with factual evidence like the presence of Lazarus at the table it would have been unreasonable to persist in unbelief.

[iv] Many Pilgrims heard Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. [12:12] For them the question, "**Will he come to the feast?**" [11:56] had been answered. Expectation was elevated to a higher level than at any other feast in the history of Israel. The countdown to history's pivot point had begun.

Jesus' encounter with Mary at the Bethany dinner party reminds us of four things

[a] Generosity

Give while you can. In a lifetime of pastoral ministry I have been saddened by all the mean people I have seen pass by into irrelevance; especially those who were involved with a church. The sign of the new life Jesus gives is expressed in the new love Mary showed.

[b] Falsehood

Beware of the indignation which is a cover for deceit. When tempted to criticise the service of others and risk causing Gospel outreach to falter, remember the example of Judas. Cry out for healing from the dread disease of falsehood. Hear the wisdom of William Shakespeare when he says, "methinks thou dost protest too much". Be indignant over godlessness, but let the witch hunt begin at home.

[c] Opportunity

Anoint the Saviour. Recognise Jesus as the only one who can bring us back into fellowship with God the Father. Reject man-made religions however difficult they may be in the standardless philosophy of a post modernist age.

[d] Response

Stop struggling. Give in! Believe the facts recorded in the Scriptures and evident in those who have life through faith in Christ. Do it while you have opportunity. It will soon pass.