

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

LOOK

Is it easier for you to give or receive a gift? Why?

Describe a time when you were excited to give a gift and the gift was not well received.

BOOK

John 12:1-8

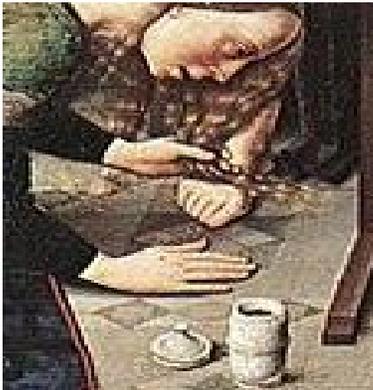
1Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

- 1) In Biblical times, anointing was for the purpose of consecration (of royalty or priesthood), for healing of sick, or preparing for burial. Jesus tells us of Mary's intent. Discuss v. 7. What is John telling us about the 'already but not yet'?
- 2) This nard was worth the equivalent of one year's pay. Can you empathize with Judas's protest? Discuss both sides of this argument about good stewardship.
- 3) In Biblical times, a woman never unbound her hair in public. Neither did she touch a man, especially not the feet of a traveler. What is the gospel writer telling us about Mary's gift? What is she risking?
- 4) John does not tell us about what Mary believes. He tells us about her faithfulness by describing her actions. What does that tell us about discipleship?
- 5) Is Jesus telling us not to care for the poor in v. 8? If this is not the message of Jesus, how would you interpret this verse?

TOOK

- 1) Have you ever gotten so caught up in the moment that you gave no thought to cost but gave all that you had? Is this what the abundant grace and generosity of God's love looks and smells like?
- 2) Does Mary's gift or how she gives it make you uncomfortable? How and why?

- 3) What might prompt you to gift a year's salary to someone? What would you think and how would you feel if someone gave a gift of that value to you? To the church?
- 4) Imagine yourself doing what Mary did, pouring herself out for Jesus at his feet. What part of this giving would be most challenging for you? The cost? The intimacy? The damage to your reputation?
- 5) How does Mary's gift and action predict the gift Jesus gives to us in his death and resurrection?



Where there is no extravagance
there is no love,
and where there is no love
there is no understanding.

-Oscar Wilde 1854-1900