

In tonight's text Jesus says these words, **'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 is a sense in which this service tonight can be seen

As part of the fulfillment of Jesus' words.

Here we are on the other side of the world,

2000 years after Jesus' resurrection,

About to hear again what this nameless woman did for Jesus

As he prepared for his suffering and death.

What this nameless woman did for Jesus was, as Jesus said,

Beautiful; it was good.

But the account of it is framed by murderous ugliness.

In other words the full beauty of what this woman did

Stands out from the darkness that surrounds it.

Listen to the words that come directly before the account:

**It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'**

The chief priests and the scribes were two groups

That would normally have been antagonistic toward each other,

But they are linked in their murderous opposition to Jesus.

They are willing to act by stealth, with cunning and without remorse.

The two groups, the chief priests and the scribes

Are together, in unified opposition to Jesus: an opposition from without.

The words directly *after* the account

Describe disunified opposition from *within*:

Opposition, indeed, not just from the followers of Jesus more generally

But from one of his own hand-picked apostles.

Listen to what the Scripture says, **'Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray [Jesus] to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.'**

It's noteworthy that Judas' action to betray Jesus  
Has its genesis in the woman's devotion, and in Jesus' approval of it.

To my mind Jesus' approval of the woman's devotion  
is the last straw for Judas:  
It's as if he thinks, 'If this is what Jesus approves of,  
This waste, this extravagance, this unrestrained devotion and love,  
Then I'm against him: He is worthy of betrayal.'

Well, it's in the face of opposition from without and from within  
That the woman does her good work for Jesus.  
Let's listen to the account:

**While [Jesus] was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.**  
The Passover is about to be celebrated;  
Jesus is about to face his suffering and death.  
And this unnamed woman comes to him with this very costly anointment.

It says she broke the jar open:  
It's possible that the jar had to be broken  
Simply because that's how the jar was constructed:  
There is, apparently, evidence from the ancient world  
That precious liquids were stored in closed stone jars.  
But whatever the case may be, the woman, in the breaking open the jar  
Was wholly committing herself  
To this extravagant act of love and devotion to Jesus.  
What was broken, what was poured out on Jesus head  
could not be retrieved.  
It was gift freely given: an end in itself.

Let's pause here for a moment.  
If you go up Goodwood Rd to Centennial Park cemetery  
You'll notice that there's a florist opposite the main gate.  
It's prudently located: people show their love toward those who have died  
By laying flowers on their graves.

Such gestures are not done because there is any financial gain in the act:  
The dead are in any position to pay back.

Such gestures also are not done because the act can do anything  
To bring the loved person back from death.

No: laying flowers on the grave simply does in action  
the thing it symbolizes:

It shows love, it shows devotion, to the one who has died.

This is what the woman is doing: it's beyond financial reckoning  
It's not about repayment: it's simply love, it is simply devotion.

But not everyone is happy with signs of love or devotion.

Listen to how the text goes on:

**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.**

Three hundred denarii is a lot of money: a year's wages for a labourer.

It's true that you can do a lot with a year's wages

And in Jesus' day there were people whose physical needs

Were greater than most of us could imagine.

The criticism this woman faced, in other words, had teeth, it had sting.

Is this how someone who loves Jesus behaves? In extravagant love?

Jesus showed great compassion and love to those who were poor:

To the sick and the disabled; to the outcast and despised.

Could he approve of this woman's actions?

Well, listen to how the text goes on:

**But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me.'**

She has done a good work, a beautiful action.

The word Jesus uses here, 'good',

has both an aesthetic and a moral meaning:

Whatever weighting we give it,

Jesus shows his approval for the woman's actions

And he defends her in the face of their scolding.

How Jesus goes on is also telling:

**For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.**

‘You who are complaining always have the poor with you...’

The implication seems to be that those who scold

Rather than criticise the woman, would do better to act according to their putative concern for the poor.

And they would do better to recognise who he, Jesus is,

And that his mission is coming to its goal at Golgotha, at Calvary.

Jesus goes on: **She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. 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.’**

This woman had, at some level, and understanding of who Jesus was.

She showed her understanding in a rightly-ordered love

And an act of devotion that anointed Jesus’ body

in preparation for its burial.

And to this day we recount this story as we proclaim the Gospel.

And so to this day Jesus’ word is fulfilled

Here at Bethlehem, as we receive and hand on

The proclamation of the Good News.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.