

March 23, 2014 “It Is Never A Waste” Matthew 26:6-13

Jesus has friends. One of those friends is Simon the leper. A man who is literally known for the disease that reduced his life to ashes. It is not the only possibility. The text does not tell us that this is what occurred, but how much do you want to bet, he is a man whom Jesus healed of that dreaded skin disease? I am drawn to the fact it does not say Jesus was at the home of the family of a man who was known as Simon the leper. And Lepers, people with leprosy were not permitted to remain in their homes or with their families. They lived in the horrible isolation of leper colonies, so that the diseased might die, and the whole might remain healthy.

Jesus was at the home of a man known as Simon the leper. The implication is that he was a leper. Was well known to be a man dying of leprosy. Was isolated and away. But now he is free. Now he is home again. Now he can afford to entertain. And why not have Jesus come to dinner? I think the evidence indicates this is a man Simon the leper who could not do enough, give enough, help enough when it comes to Jesus. He was a man who was living with death, and now is alive. Of course bring the disciples! It is time to celebrate. Guess who? Jesus is coming to dinner.

It is like an open house. People are coming and going. Jesus is reclining at the low table where he is eating in that

mideastern style of the time. There is food. There is noise. There is wine. And there is this woman. She comes rather suddenly. Matthew does not know or at least does not tell us her name. Her name is the least important detail as Matthew sees it. It is the week leading up to the celebration of the Feast of the Passover. Jesus is in Bethany because it is close enough that He and the 12 can walk there from Jerusalem.

The first thing that Matthew noticed about the woman was this jar. Alabaster. It was delicate, as fragile as an egg shell. It was lovely. It may have been worth as much as the perfume it contained. Matthew remember had been a tax collector. He is used to money. He recognized quality. This perfume and its container advertised that it was good stuff, if you noticed that detail. Matthew did. And at this point we are not told this woman's story. It is obvious from what she does she has one.

She does not announce her name. She does not ask permission. She does nothing to draw attention to herself. She simply approaches Jesus, breaks the container (it will never be used for anything again) and anoints Jesus with the precious contents of the jar. What she does is the work of a servant. Anointing the guest of honour. And in fact the only reason we know anything about her is the reaction of the disciples. The person who spoke up created a serious stir. He

gasped. He pointed. He caused everyone in the house to turn and see her. Was it Judas? We don't know because we aren't told. We do know Judas handled the money for Jesus and the team, the twelve.

Whichever of the 12 started it, it became the reason for a scene. They are all over this woman for wasting a precious commodity that could have been sold for a considerable sum. And they are buzzing with the idea of how they could have helped the poor with that much money. It is one of those Biblical scenes that gives men a bad name. They just can't believe she has wasted it. I find it easy to imagine that one of them has picked up some of the delicate fragments of the container (oh this was lovely) and she has wasted the whole thing! They may have called her silly. They more likely called her stupid. They may have tried to push her away. One thing is certain. Attention having been drawn to her and the perfume, what she has done with it....she hasn't a friend in the house. Except Jesus.

Now there are a number of voices raised. And the voice of Jesus is the loudest. His voice and tone cut through the indignation of those who see money going down the drain. When Jesus understood what they were trying to do to her, cut her off, send her out and away, He stops them. His question is to the disciples. He wants them to answer for their attitude.

“Why are you troubling her, why are you bothering her. Why are you on her case. “She has done a beautiful thing to me!” And suddenly once again she is even more the center of everyone’s attention.

Isn’t it interesting that Simon the leper has no place in this story other than the fact that he has provided the place, created the occasion, arranged the circumstance in which the details unfold. For many of us that will be the lasting legacy of our contribution to the Kingdom of God. We provided an opportunity even unwittingly in which the Spirit of God ministered to someone else. We opened a door that we thought was a little porthole of a window. We had no idea how Jesus would bless someone just because we made tea and muffins. Or rearranged the furniture so a gathering could occur.

Jesus says something about the poor. It is important. The issue was this perfume and even its container could have been sold for significant cash. Cash that would have bought food, that could have made a real difference if it had been used to touch the lives of the poorest of the poor with relief, with mercy, with the grace of...whatever. Jesus says you will always have the poor with you. He is not dismissing the lot of the poor. Jesus did more to give hope to the poor and the outcast than any other figure in the whole of human history. He creates the conscience that will end slavery in the western

world and cause it to be seen as a shameful reality wherever it is practiced. He gave women standing by including them in His teaching circles. By treating them as people instead of property. It is among the poorest of the poor that Jesus ministers giving sight and hearing and health where the only real option was death and loss.

But Jesus says what is true. “You will always have the poor with you.” Think of the programmes and the strategies that people have created in order to solve the problem of poverty. And women and children continue to be the greatest victims of poverty. Jesus says the problem of poverty is so complex that good programmes and great strategies will never solve the problem so that it ceases to be. As long as there is life, as long as people live in communities, as long as nations exist as we now understand nations...there will be those who have a great deal of this world’s wealth and there will be those who have next to nothing.

And Jesus is not saying you don’t have to care. If anything he has taught these disciples of His to care and to do what they can to help. But He is saying something else. “You will not always have me physically present with you.” A day at a time this last week is passing. The cross is a day closer at this point than it was on the morning of that day. The Son of Man is going to die to save sinners. And the 3rd day He will be raised to

life. Time is running out. And what this un-named woman has done is this: she has anointed his body, preparing it for burial.

We have a tendency to think it is an afterthought, and it is not. Jesus quickly adds that wherever people tell the gospel story...the truth about Jesus that He came, was born into the world, grew up into manhood, served in ministry, was crucified and rose from the dead...wherever that good news is shared, this woman will be spoken about. She is part of the story. And for that matter so is Simon the leper whoever he was. The man with the house. The man who opened his home to Jesus and the twelve and the rest of them....the people who came and ate and listened and watched and saw what Matthew saw.

I keep saying the gospels are not attempts to write biographies in the modern sense of that term. They are not individual attempts at writing the life of Christ. We see that in this little vignette. Matthew is endeavouring to tell the gospel, the truth about how a person can be saved from his or her sin. How a person can have eternal life. How God reaches out and touches and saves lives.... through faith in Jesus. And as surely as he felt to tell that story he had to tell about foreigners, not Jews, Magi priests who saw a star and followed it to find and worship and give gifts to the King of Kings who is truly a King, truly divine, truly born to die. As surely as he felt he had to

include that story, Matthew felt he had to include the story of this un-named woman who anointed Jesus with a rare and rich perfume just a day or two before He was arrested and crucified, dead and buried.

And me too! I can't tell the gospel story without including her. Jesus prophecy came true when Matthew told the story that begins "when Jesus was in Bethany at the home of a man known as Simon the leper." But it also comes true anytime a preacher or Bible teacher in telling the story of Jesus, the gospel, mentions the woman who anointed him with the perfume she brought in an alabaster container. The message is fundamental. It is never a waste to glorify Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord, my Saviour. It is never a waste to do that. Never.

Let us pray;

Lord sometimes living the faith, becomes routine. Usually happens because we are really serious about You, Your Word, Your Kingdom. Remind us, stir our hearts, rev up our minds, with the thought it is never a waste of time, or effort or resources, to seek to honour You. Transform our routines into glorious moments because you are present, because you are alive. Amen