

## **Holy Week Monday 2020 (Isaiah 42.1-9, Hebrews 9.11-15, John 12.1-11)**

We are living in strange and remarkable times that were barely conceivable only weeks ago. Perhaps this will help us appreciate the strange and remarkable things prophets do and say, as they act out or speak to a truth no one else can see.

Witnesses can be incensed or dumbstruck by the disturbing acts and news these prophets bring from God. Who of us would not have been stunned to see the prophet Isaiah walk naked around Jerusalem at one stage? Today it is Mary who shocks everyone present, except Jesus, by first opening the precious jar of oil that fills the entire house with its intense smell, before doing yet more amazing things.

She lets her hair down in a room full of men, which no respectable woman would; she pours the oil on Jesus' feet; she touches him, which no unmarried woman would, even among friends; and then she wipes his feet with her hair. It is extravagant and excessive and as remarkable as Isaiah walking around town naked.

Others present are dumbstruck but Judas is not; he seems angry. This oil costs 300 denarii, about a year's wages for a labourer. In a matter of days Judas will betray Jesus for a mere 30 pieces of silver, equivalent to about 4 month's wages, and a third of the cost of Mary's oil. Judas knows the price of things, but is blind to their true value.

Perhaps Judas only said out loud what those shocked into silence at this scene were also thinking. It would have been surprising, but more understandable, if Mary had anointed Jesus' head. Then everyone present could have proclaimed him King following his procession into Jerusalem the previous day. Yet the only man who ever had his feet anointed was a dead one, as Jesus recognises when he acknowledges Mary's prophetic act and his imminent burial.

Mary does what she does and thinks nothing of the cost. She is reckless, both about the expense of the oil and the cost to her reputation in what she does so flagrantly in front of others. Judas thinks of the waste of the oil and the cost to Jesus' reputation when he accepts Mary's anointing and touch. This is not the act of the sort of triumphant King he has been following. We see Judas' self-destructive meanness in stark contrast to Mary's self-giving generosity.

There is nothing safe or economical about Mary's prophetic act of loving generosity, and there is nothing safe or economical about Jesus in life or death. God's extravagant love is made flesh in Jesus and through Him the excessiveness and fragrance of God's mercy is made apparent to us. It smells like heaven.

Such an expensive jar of oil is not to be stored away and never used. This precious substance is to be offered up freely, regardless of the cost, just as Jesus is raised up and poured out for the life of the world and us all. There's no need for stockpiling; there will always be enough, because there is nothing cheap or mean when it comes to the love of God.

Mary the prophet got the message and acted upon the truth she saw see in Jesus, her Lord and Saviour. May we all have the courage to follow Mary's example, because where God is concerned there is always more – of mercy and forgiveness, of love and of life – always far more than we can ask for or imagine.