

Kevin Powell

John 12: 1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (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.)

Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Grace to you and peace from the One who calls you beloved. Amen.

Six days before the Passover.

That is how the story begins.

But tonight, we hear it from inside the week itself.

We have stepped into Holy Week, where everything feels closer, heavier, more exposed.

The shadows are not distant now.

They are lengthening.

And still, this story invites us to begin not with the cross, but with a table.

A house in Bethany.

A meal among friends.

Lazarus is there, living proof that life can return where death once settled in.

Martha moves with purpose, tending, holding the room together.

And Mary of Bethany... watches.

Something about Mary in this moment draws our attention.

A stillness that is not passive.

An attentiveness that feels like listening for something no one else can hear.

Because Holy Week does that.

It sharpens perception.

It asks us to notice what is unfolding beneath the surface.

And Mary seems to know.

She rises.

She carries the jar.

It is too costly for this moment.

Too extravagant.

Too much.

And yet, she does not hesitate.

She opens it.

She pours.

She kneels.

She anoints.

And the fragrance fills the house.

Not gently.

But completely.

It interrupts everything.

It refuses to be ignored.

This is how love behaves when it knows time is short.

As if Mary understands something the others are not yet ready to face.

That this week will take everything.

That what is coming cannot be undone.

And so she gives what she can, while she can.

It is not a strategy.

It is a response.

And then, the resistance arrives.

Judas Iscariot speaks what others may be thinking.

Why this waste?

Why this excess?

Why not make this useful?

It is a reasonable question.

It is a question we are trained to ask.

Especially in a world that feels stretched thin.

Where need is everywhere.

Where we are taught to measure impact, to justify every cost.

And yet here, at the beginning of Holy Week, Jesus does something unexpected.

He does not correct Mary.

He protects her.

“Leave her alone.”

It is not just a defence of her action.

It is a defence of a different way of seeing.

Because Mary is not trying to fix the world.

She is honouring a moment that will not come again.

She is not calculating outcomes.

She is responding to presence.

And perhaps that is the quiet invitation of this night.

Because Holy Week is not something we solve.

It is something we enter.

And along the way, there will be moments—small, easily overlooked—where something sacred is placed before us.

A conversation.

A silence.

A gesture.

And we will have a choice.

To measure it.

Or to receive it.

To hold back.

Or to pour out.

Mary pours.

And the fragrance fills the house.

And I wonder, does it linger?

Does it follow them into the days ahead, when everything begins to unravel?

Because if it does, then this moment becomes a witness.

That even as the story darkens, something beautiful has already been released.

And maybe that is what we carry into this week.

Not certainty.

Not control.

But the lingering scent of love that has already been given.

A reminder that before the cross, there was this.

A woman kneeling.

A jar breaking.

A house filled.

And a voice saying, "Leave her alone."

As if to say:

Let this be what it is.

Let love have its moment.

Let beauty interrupt despair.

Because Holy Week will ask much of us.

It will ask us to stay when we would rather turn away.
To witness what we cannot fix.

And in the midst of that, this story reminds us:

Not everything holy is heavy.

Some of it is tender.

Some of it is a quiet, extravagant act that makes no sense
except that it is love.

So as we begin this week, perhaps the question is not what
we will accomplish.

But what we will notice.

What we will receive.

What we will pour out, while we still can.

Because this week does not begin with death.

It begins with love filling a house.

And perhaps, when we are attentive,

we will find that same fragrance

lingering here.

Amen.