

I want to link this Gospel with another that is set in Bethany, a village just a couple of miles from the bustling Jerusalem, where Jesus, Mary, and Martha are gathered at the home of Lazarus. Yes, the very same Lazarus – raised from the dead Lazarus.

We also know that Judas was present, and so I presume at least some of the other disciples were around, but the story focuses only on Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, who we are told in the previous chapter of John's account, are **loved** by Jesus.

And yet, none of these 3 are considered disciples of Jesus. They're his **friends**.

Not long before they had all gathered together for this dinner, when Jesus had heard of the death of Lazarus, he was grieved. When he witnessed Mary & Martha weeping over Lazarus' death, Jesus also wept.

And in a scene that I imagine was just as bizarre for those present as it is to us, Jesus raised his friend Lazarus back to life.

This was the first resurrection.

And up until the dinner they are gathered for in today's Gospel, this was the last time they all hung out together.

So picture this reunion gathering, with Lazarus sitting at the table, the big elephant in the room, still reeking of death.

We don't even get a word out of Lazarus in this story.

I imagine he must have been traumatized, aware of his own stench and the lengths which were gone to to bring him back to life.

Martha is there, and not knowing what else to do, she hides her control issues and anxiety under a guise of hospitality, making sure everything is just-so, and everyone is served and taken care of. (Maybe you can relate to that). Jesus is also present, of course.

He doesn't make any bold declarations during this specific encounter, but I am sure his words from before are still echoing in the minds and hearts of all present: ***I am the resurrection and the life.***

Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live! John 11:25

To that proclamation it was Mary who replied, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

And now, when everyone else is doing their best to "be cool" with the obvious tension of this reunion, it's Mary who takes action.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard,
anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.

Uh, Mary did what? Why? What an unusual thing to do.

But OK ... You do you, Mary. And she did.

This Mary, in all of her encounters, is honest and authentic,
and maybe a bit oblivious to social norms or the reactions of her peers.

When Lazarus died, she basically blamed Jesus, saying,

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!”

She cried out this accusation as she was on the ground, kneeling at his

And then, as we know, Jesus proclaims that he is the resurrection & the lif

And in case those present needed proof...bam – Lazarus!

But, as it turns out, healing the sick and raising the dead and calling
yourself the Messiah doesn't go over well with religious leaders.

The chief priests and Pharisees then call for Jesus to be arrested.

Jesus goes into hiding and Mary must have felt some responsibility for this

So what does she do?

When all are gathered for dinner and no one knows just what to do or say,

Mary returns once again to the feet of Jesus,

where she had cried out to him to save her brother.

He did ... save her brother Lazarus.

And now, as they both are becoming more and more aware of, he will die.

So she grabs some fancy perfume made of nard,

which was used to prepare bodies for burial,

that they just happen to have on hand!

Perhaps it was intended for Lazarus.

At any rate, the aroma of this particular perfume would have evoked
thoughts of death for those who shared the space.

And so we can't help but wonder, why is Mary using it now, on Jesus,
when Jesus is still alive?

It seems Mary is choosing to disregard not only the sentimental value of
using up this precious bottle of perfume, but its financial value,

which Judas is quick to point out.

2 thoughts.

First, I think maybe Mary helped inspire the KonMari method –

or, shall we say, the KonMary method! lol

If you're not going to use it, what are you keeping it for? Resist the clutter!

But, beyond that,

I think Mary understood the spiritual significance of spending,

which we too often think of as wasting, and I guess sometimes it is.

But theologian Paul Tillich says, *“The history of humankind is the history of
men and women who wasted themselves and were not afraid to do so.*

They did not fear to waste themselves in the service of a new creation.”

Annie Dillard, echoing that sentiment, advises her readers to
“SPEND the afternoon. You can’t take it with you.”

What are we keeping the good wine in the cellar for?

Why aren’t we taking every opportunity possible to do the things we love?
To read.

To go outside.

To have dinner with friends.

To reach out to those we love.

Why does it always feel like such an ordeal to do these simple,
life-giving things? It’s not supposed to be like that!

**What makes life special isn’t that these opportunities are rare,
it is that we embrace them.**

And Mary is going to embrace Jesus in this moment.

It is our friends and our family, those in our community,
who raise us up and lift us to new life.

And it is our friends, our family, and those in our community,
who draw near to us and remain with us when we suffer
and when we are faced with death.

So Mary, thankful for the life and gifts of Jesus
while acknowledging his approaching death,
anointed Jesus’ feet with the perfume,
and she lovingly wiped his feet with her hair.

We can only speculate as to why she used her hair, and not her hands,
and there is certainly a lot of speculation out there,
but it does feel significant to me that the perfume and its scent
will likely remain in her hair for some time to come.

The fragrance will linger, and in this way,
she is able to hold the moment, and to hold Jesus, close to her.

Her actions have transformed this perfume, which is used for the dead,
into a relic and a reminder of the life of her friend and Savior, Jesus.

A true waste would have actually been to NOT to have used the perfume,
to have just let it sit on the shelf.

But instead, Mary anoints Jesus,
and meanwhile the perfume is lathered into her hair,
making it a part of her very own being.

And then we have Judas, who witnesses Mary’s extravagant gesture,
and he scoffs at her.

*“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii
and the money given to the poor?”*

Judas says this because he’s been paying attention.

Jesus has been saying over and over again to his disciples

and everywhere he went, to care for the poor.

Bethany was also known as a place that served the poor & treated the sick
So it was politically expedient for Judas to protest that the financial value
of the perfume should be given to the poor.

But as the Gospel writer points out, the poor were not his concern.

He was greedy, and would have kept the money for himself.

Truthfully, I think he probably felt left out, again, and became embittered.

Judas, although a conflicted character, WAS CLOSE to Jesus.

But he didn't feel as close to Jesus as Lazarus, Mary, and Martha –
at least not in this moment.

Judas was Jesus' disciple, and yet, Jesus sides with Mary, saying,

*“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.*

And this is the truth that only Mary seemed to be aware of.

And THIS truth, NOT a neglect of the poor,
moved her to embrace Christ in that moment.

And it is a good example for us, especially as we remember our beloved.

What will it take for us to spend our days with purpose?

To acknowledge those we love who are grieving and dying,

and to take action,

whether the moment calls us to resurrection and new life,

or as is often the case,

to make a gesture,

to do something,

and anoint their grief.