

Title: At the Feet of Jesus

Subtitle: A place to discover the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

Video URL: https://youtu.be/ltj5_oRhjSk

This Sunday's Gospel begins with the words, "*Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.*"¹ The context is set within the last week of Jesus' life, a week filled with the drama of heartache and passion, danger and intrigue. But before the drama hits its climax, the events of the week are kicked off with a dinner party. Matthew and Mark's Gospel informs us that it was hosted "*...in the home of Simon the leper*"², who obviously had been healed, or he couldn't have held the event. Then our Gospel tells us, "*Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table.*"³

As the scene is set, it is vital to notice that two of the characters, Simon the Leper and Lazarus, have had spectacular, life-changing experiences with Jesus. Then it mentions that "*Martha served.*" If Martha was serving, you could bet that everything about this dinner party was lavishly prepared to perfection.

But the story's focus is not on any of these people or things. Instead, it is upon Mary—a woman previously featured in Luke's Gospel for her love and devotion to Jesus. And she does something that is so extravagant that it draws criticism not only

¹ John 12:1

² Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3

³ John 12:2

from Judas but also from some of the other disciples who were present.

John writes, ***“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.”***⁴

Matthew’s Gospel reads, ***“But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, ‘Why this waste?’”***⁵ And in some ways, I can’t blame them for their judgment. Many of them were living hand to mouth and could think of many other ways to utilize its value.

But there is a Gospel lesson here that has more to teach us than the dollar amount that one could attach to it. Mary was expressing her heartfelt love and devotion for one who meant more to her than anything. She couldn’t count the many acts of kindness she had received, not the least of which included the raising of her brother, Lazarus, from the dead. And then there was the healing of Simon the Leper, who could have been a close relative since the event (according to Matthew and Mark) took place in his home. Simon’s healing restored his body and his most intimate relationships with family and friends, including Mary. Both miracles were something on which you could never place a dollar sign. And when Judas and the other disciples complain about the apparent use of such an expensive ointment, Matthew and Mark’s Gospel lend further insight. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus defends her and says, ***“She has done a beautiful thing to me.”***⁶ Mark’s Gospel adds, ***“For you always have the***

⁴ John 12:3

⁵ Matthew 26:8

⁶ Matthew 21:10 and Mark 14:6

*poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.*⁸ *She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.*⁷

Therefore, Jesus views Mary's offering as having more than just sentimental value. It was made in preparation for his burial. In Mark's telling, each scene contributes to the sense that the end is near. Jesus knows it; Judas and the religious leaders plot it, and Mary intuitively wants to properly prepare him for it as she anoints him with her precious ointment.⁸

Mary knew the time she had with Jesus was very short, and if she was going to do something for Jesus, it had to be done now. Apparently, none of the other disciples could grasp the reality that Jesus had to die. Jesus had tried to tell them and did so explicitly on three previous occasions.

So how did Mary understand these things when the others, particularly the disciples, failed? Because she was seen, over and over again, sitting at his feet and listening to every word he spoke.⁹ And today, she is at the feet of Jesus again as she *"anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair."*

AT JESUS' FEET was Mary's favorite place to be. It was a posture that placed her upon holy ground. It was a secret place that enabled her to understand things hidden from others. Consequently, she could look at this expense through different eyes and set her heart where true joys were to be found.

⁷ Mark 14:7-8

⁸ Paraphrased from N.T.Wright, p. 190

⁹ Luke 10:38-42

Our New Testament lesson referred to this when Paul wrote, ***“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸ More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.*”¹⁰**

The famous hymn ‘*When I survey the wondrous cross*’ written by Isaac Watts marvelously expresses this same sentiment:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.¹¹*

This kind of heartfelt response is a Gospel thing – a beautiful thing. So let me ask you:

- Are there things that you once considered as gain that now could (or should) be regarded as loss for the sake of Christ?
- Is there something in your life of great value that God wants you to pour out on the feet of Christ?
- Could such an offering help to proclaim the Gospel in your memory?

Answering such questions is all part of the soul-work inherent in our Lenten devotions as we approach the Paschal feast and find ourselves at the foot of the cross, where the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus is revealed. *Amen.*

¹⁰ Phillipians 3:7-8

¹¹ Hymn 478, When I survey the wondrous cross, words by Isaac Watts