

**21/02/2-24 Mark 14:1-21 1st Wednesday in Lent**  
**Pastor Fraser Pearce**

The Gospels reveal that at the heart of discipleship

- Is being with Jesus, and learning who he is:
- Learning who he is by listening to him,
- And letting his word shape our lives
- So that we become people who are wise
- Not only in relation to the things of God,
- But also wise in the use of very worldly things
- Like money and possessions.

Tonight we'll focus on two people

- One who is wise with her use of possessions:
- The woman who anointed Jesus
- And one who is foolish is his desire for money:
- Judas, who agreed to betray Jesus for financial gain.
- And as we meditate we'll be with Jesus and receive his word
- So that we may share in his mindset
- As he is on the path to the cross.

First, let's hear again about the woman at Bethany:

- **The While [Jesus] was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.**
- This act of devotion comes right after
- We hear of the religious leaders plotting to kill Jesus,
- And it comes right before we hear of Judas agreeing, for money,
- To betray Jesus at an opportune time.

So: in between actions of murderous intent

- We have an act of devotion that we remember to this day:
- The woman *anointing* Jesus:

- She does an action for the Messianic King and High Priest
- In fact, 'Messiah' or 'Christ' means 'anointed'
- And this is the only time in the Gospel
- That Jesus is actually anointed
- One commentator has said, ***'The woman's gesture anticipates what Jesus himself will do: she breaks and pours out her greatest treasure on him, as he would break and pour out his life for all humanity.'***
- The woman's anointing is part of the revelation of Jesus
- As the Christ, as the anointed one who would go to his death
- As a ransom for sinners.

But there is opposition to the woman's devotion:

- **[S]ome were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her.**
- In Matthew's Gospel we have the same account
- Of the woman anointing Jesus
- And there it is specified that it is *the disciples themselves*
- Who are the ones who are critical
- So, in Matthew we read this:
- **But when *the disciples* saw it, they were angry and said, 'Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.'** (Matthew 26)
- And there's also this, in a similar setting, from John's Gospel:
- **But Judas Iscariot, one of [Jesus'] 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?'** (John 12)
- We'll come back to Judas. But for now
- We'll see that those with Jesus needed to learn from him.

Now, it's possible that the woman's critics, even Jesus own disciples,

- Could have thought that they would gain Jesus' approval
- In their criticism of the woman's apparent wastefulness.
- After all, earlier in Mark's Gospel
- Jesus had commanded the rich young man to sell all he had
- And give the proceeds *to the poor*, and follow him.
- But there is in fact a consonance in Jesus' teaching then
- And his praise of the woman's anointing
- And that is *the prioritising of devotion to God*.
- Jesus had done this before:
- When Jesus saw the poor widow put two small copper coins
- Into the temple treasury, he praised her devotion, her faith
- And here he praises the woman for her devotion:
- **But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'**
- Jesus, in talking about the poor, is evidently alluding
- To Deuteronomy, where we read these words:
- **'Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.'** (Deuteronomy 15:11)
- Jesus knows the godliness, the wisdom, of helping those in need
- But here he upholds the priority of devotion:
- Of the greatest commandment: to love God
- And indeed we remember the devotion of this woman
- As the Gospel is preached here at Bethlehem,
- And by this we are encouraged in our own devotion to Jesus.

But if the woman is a positive example to follow,

- Judas is a negative example for us avoid.

- This is what we read direct after Jesus' words of praise
- **Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.**
- It is worth considering the significance of the timing:
- Immediately after Jesus praising the woman's
- Wise and devoted use of her precious possession
- Judas goes to plan Jesus' betrayal
- With the promise of monetary reward,
- And, as we know from the unfolding of the Gospel
- There is a declension into death:
- Judas hands Jesus over to the Jewish leaders
- The Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to a pagan ruler
- The pagan ruler hands him over to be crucified.

Tonight we are with Jesus on the path to the cross

- And by being with him we learn from those around him:
- By the devotion of the woman
- We are encouraged in our acts of devotion to Jesus,
- And by the plotting of Judas
- And we are warned against seeking to grasp
- Money and possessions by betraying the Lord.
- And at the centre is Jesus,
- Who knows our need,
- And in his love reconciles us to the Father.
- So, let's follow where he leads us:
- Into wisdom with our money and possessions,
- And into the fulness of life with God.
- In Jesus' name. Amen.