

Living Lent | Friday, March 25

Gareth Allcott

Regardless of the Cost

Today's Reading: John 12:1-11

"...Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

John 12:2-8 NIV

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

Today's text takes us into the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, dear friends of Jesus, just days before the Lord's crucifixion. A celebration meal is taking place to honor Jesus, and the two sisters portray precisely the characteristics recorded in Luke when Jesus made a previous visit to their home: Martha is serving while Mary chooses to be as close as she can be to Jesus. Only on this particular occasion, Mary is not satisfied to simply sit at the feet of the Savior. This time she engages in an act so outlandish

that it provokes a stern reaction in Judas Iscariot that in turn prompts a pointed rebuke from Jesus.

Pouring a large quantity of costly nard on Jesus' feet was both extravagant and unusual, but what Mary did next was truly outrageous given the cultural norms of the day. She, an unmarried woman, let down her hair in the presence of men and used it as a towel to dry the Lord's feet. Almost certainly no one in that room, other than Jesus, understood the significance of what was taking place. He knew that Mary's act was a prophetic sign of his impending execution; that she

would not have the opportunity to anoint his body at the time of his death, but she could honor him now. And Mary took full advantage of that opportunity, regardless of any potential cost to her reputation.

Martha, it appears, chose to stay in the background, but was she wondering, "What can my sister possibly be thinking? Again!"

We know what Judas's response was, but lest we are tempted to pile on to him we might do well to consider that he was likely expressing a sentiment that some of the other disciples simply remained silent about.

What might this poignant scene from long ago have to say to you and me today? I believe the Holy Spirit might be inviting each of us to consider carefully how we are spending our time and energy with and for Jesus. Am I going to play it safe and remain in the background? Am I going to expend energy critiquing those who choose to worship the Lord extravagantly and in ways that seem strange to me? Or will I choose to invest everything I have in honoring Jesus now, regardless of cost? We have decisions and choices to make as we draw ever nearer to the cross.

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ:

Throughout its history, Saint Marks Episcopal Church in Brunswick, GA, has served Glynn County and MorningStar Children's Home as Christ's hands and feet. The Reverend Gareth Allcott is the Assistant to the Rector for Christian Leadership Formation at Saint Mark's.