

John 12: 1-8

Lent 5 – Journey Theme March 17, 2013

On every journey you have to stop for rest, repack if things have become jumbled in your luggage
... check the map

.see if there's a choice - a fork in the road, there are so many of those! Weigh it out...make the decision....assess what you'll need to continue
and simply rest aching feet and have a shower to wash off the dust of the road at least for a while.

I pray that this time and this space is such an oasis for you.

I pray too that this text will be for you food for your journey
refreshment for your body and soul
and a realignment of your inner compass....so that when you set out from here, you'll know a little better -
perhaps not where your journey will lead you, but at least that you're not alone; that you know who walks
with you, and what you need to sustain you on the road.

This text has within it at least 100 sermons. The one I want to offer you today is pretty simple I think
but before I get there, I want to at least try to do justice to the richness it offers. As is true for all scripture,
it has nuances, hints, images, references, so much packed into 8 verses to help us sniff out the
meaning....let me take you on a fast trip through some of that.

First: the passage begins "Six days before Passover". We can't just skip over that. To begin, (:0) 6 days
recalls Creation....and then 6 days before PASSOVER? Passover – THE defining story of the Jewish
people, the paradigm of freedom and grace for human living....Passover. So... this opening few words
recall for us the Exodus, the desperate escape of a people called to freedom...do you remember this?
The voice from the burning bush saying "let my people go" and Moses, with Aaron and Miriam, leading
them, the parting of the sea.....this is the story that formed and fed the Jewish people, sustained them
through centuries of very complicated history, and sustains them still. Passover. Exodus.

And it's not all freedom and celebration...Passover has the scent of death about it too, always....the story
goes that the angel of death visited the first born of the Egyptians, and that the very parting of the sea that
saved the Hebrews, ended in the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea -

Hard, hard stuff. Just saying the word Passover recalls all of that. So when John begins "it was 6 days
before Passover" you KNOW you're in for something big.

He goes on: "Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead"
Remember that story? Oh let's read it anyway!

11: 1-44

The raising of Lazarus seemed to be the final straw for the religious establishment. It was the thing,
according to John, that made them decide the guy had to go. Before, he was just making noise, bothering
them, making them look bad and challenging their authority. NOW? Lazarus pushed them over the edge.
Imagine - raising someone from the dead. What do you DO with a guy like that? He's going to come to
the attention of Rome, Rome is going to come in and they'll all be in trouble. No, this can't go on. They're
going to make sure he dies.

It's almost Passover - everyone will be in town. Word goes out that they're looking for Jesus and the big
talk in the city is "what's he going to do - will he show up? Does he know they're out to get him?" So
what DOES Jesus do? Go into hiding? Get out of town for a while until they calm down? No – he walks

right into it. It's like...in the raising of Lazarus something ended, and something began. It's the end of his teaching ministry now, the end of wandering around teaching and healing, that's over. something new has happened and he's walking right toward it.

He began his public ministry in this gospel with a sign of extravagance – the water turned to wine remember? That was his first public sign. More wine than they could believe...he ends it here with another sign of extravagance ...but I'm getting ahead of myself.

They're out to get him

he goes to Bethany – right where he raised Lazarus, to a public dinner to celebrate that! He knew what he was doing – it meant death for him and he walks toward it.....

So we see them all at the table that night, there he is with Lazarus, who is sitting there, with the scent of the tomb still on him, more than a whiff of danger in the air, he may be arrested at any moment... there he sits, eating and laughing and enjoying the moment...in the home of good friends, maybe for the last time....but only he knows that.

One final thing to lift up is that all of this takes place at the table. Now: there are standard images in the Bible that, when you read them you know something big is up. Passover is one of course. So is harvest , so is the vineyard, and so is a feast. When you read about these things you know that at least at one level we're talking about the reign of God. When the Bible starts talking about a feast, look out. It's a glimpse of how things are meant to be ...what God's dream is.....the kingdom, the reign and realm of God, and how it WILL be, at the end.

So here we are at the table. Who is there? M, M, L, J and Judas is there too....doesn't that make you go hmhhh?

ANYWAY, that's for another time.

So....with all of that in the air, let's look again at the passage.

READ IT

That is a scene so intimate it almost makes you want to look away.... picture that. In that culture, just for starters, a woman did not touch or look at a man in public, did not let her hair down...and it was the duty of the lowest servants to wash the feet of guests.

In every way this is shocking, reversing social and religious expectations and customs. As the odour of the fullness of the reign of God draws near, so many things are called into question, wiped away with a lavish gesture of love.

The room would have gone dead quiet. The question about the cost is a distraction ...of course 300 dinari, (a year's wages, some say) has an odour of its own to be sure, but here, it feels like a red herring. Something to think about with the head – I just want to swat it away like a fly...it gets in the way. You know how people will often do anything to avoid going deep? Facing raw emotion, intense feeling? I think that's what the question of the money is about. Anything to draw them away from the depth of what is happening before them. With his head buried in the balance sheet, Judas can't see the chasm in the road ahead - can't see what the stakes are in avoiding it or walking right in. It's a distraction from the intensity of the moment.

It's beautiful.

Suzanne Guthrie says something like this:

It's a moment of intense and wordless intimacy: Jesus is there, knowing the time is near. Knowing that he is going to die. And that somehow, the fullness of the Kingdom is at hand. Mary knows it too. The others? Not so much. They are confused, they are unaware. They have been so focused on the things of no

ultimate consequence on the road....like pups that follow the scent of anything at all, anywhere at all....into the bushes and you have to go find thembefore they are trained to focus on what the goal is....so distracted by other scents, that they've missed the big picture. The disciples are like those pups, eager and untrained noses to the ground at the expense of what is happening around them. Bless their hearts they will disappoint even more before this is over....following the scent of fear, which, if you're not careful, can poison and overwhelm the more subtle fragrances of the spirit. They don't know where this is leading....they just don't know.

Mary, in anointing not the head as you would a monarch, (It's her own head that gets anointed here)in not anointing the head as you would a monarch, but the feet as you would a corpse, Mary in that gesture, says to him without words, "I know"

and he, in accepting her gift, her embarrassing, outrageous gift, in accepting it, he says without words "I know you know"

and that - in the end, must have been a gift without price for him...to have her understand, to have someone who loved him know, not try to argue him out of it, not run from it, do nothing but offer acceptance and love....

Oh my goodness.

He's about to go to his death. His ministry as he's known it for the last 3 years is over.

His life is about to be over

and who knows what is in his head and heart....

he's known for ...well forever...

and he's set his face and heart toward it and will not be tempted or talked away from that path even though the tempter, still biding his time, is creeping closer, he will not be lured from the path he has chosen...

but still....

it must have been a very lonely time. It's lovely to have people who need you and want to learn from you but oh my goodness it's such a luxury to have someone who needs nothing from you but is there for you To have someone touch you in the most intimate way – warm scented hands and hair on your feet, and look at you with eyes that say "I know"

On your journey I wish for you this gift.

Someone who will be there; someone who knows.

The gift of not having to explain yourself

the sweet and fragrant moment where someone just says I know.

If there is no such human person for you

as is true for many, many people

if there is no such person

there still is one who knows, who abides, who holds you and loves you and just knows.

May the scent of that truth be sweet

and may we offer it to others as we continue this journey

this long and winding road

and in the receiving may we in turn become feast givers, fragrance spillers

in whose loving and gentle hands

the feet of the world can be held and given hope