



PALM SUNDAY

Palm Sunday, as most celebrations this year will look a little different. For me, back where I grew up, we would normally celebrate with the local Anglican Cathedral and begin together outside with a procession and an actual donkey reading the Gospel of Mark with the famous entry into Jerusalem before going to our respective churches to continue the liturgy.

Though there will be no outside processions you will still hopefully hear that Gospel. You will also hear the Passion of Our Lord, though most likely the shorter version, and so for our Gospel reflection this week I've chosen a passage from the 'long' version of the Gospel to concentrate on. For us to remain in this period before Jesus' passion, but to still look forward towards what will come, to what He has done for us.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Mark 14:3-9

³ And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,^[a] as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴ There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii^[b] and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹ And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

Reflection

What a powerful image this invokes. Imagine holding within your hands this rather precious flask of 'very costly' ointment, a jar that is meant to be kept for a special and particular event, yet instead you are walking towards Jesus knowing that the only thing you can do is to give it all to him.

You woke up that morning and knew that this man called Jesus was coming to your neighbours' home and you wanted to say hello, to welcome him. Perhaps you thought about cooking him some food? Perhaps you could have written him a thank you card? Perhaps you thought about asking him to pray for you? But no there was only one thing that came to mind to give to him – the most precious thing that you own. The object which is used to symbolise you have given yourself to someone else.

So here you are again walking towards him with this fragile flask of ointment and not only do you pour a little out, perfectly measured with what might seem an 'appropriate' amount to anoint his hair with, no you break it open completely and pour everything over his head.

The question immediately asked is 'why was the ointment wasted like that' so we know that the woman didn't just take the lid off and pour a little on Jesus' head, as though this was a measured calculated act and she was just doing what was necessary like measuring some oil out to make a cake. If she had carefully measured and used only a little perhaps no one would have questioned her decision. But the fact that the action is immediately followed by this statement of outrage, we know that the woman has done something extravagant, something apparently unnecessary.

However, this is not a random reckless act. She would still have had to make a decision, just as one would when measuring out that cup of oil for the cake, but this time she has decided with her whole heart to hold nothing back.

Another point to perhaps briefly dwell on, is that this alabaster jar is not like the ceramic mug you might be drinking your tea out of, that you can still occasionally drop on a hard floor and it might survive, the woman appears to break the flask easily. Alabaster is soft, it is not normally used for outdoor items due to its solubility. You could perhaps say that it has a fragility to it?

Perhaps we are feeling like that fragile flask at the moment. Questioning why do we have to give anything to the Lord – I don't have anything left to give – I only have enough to carefully measure out just a little because the rest can be 'spent' elsewhere, indeed we might feel that it needs to be spent elsewhere.

But let us take a moment to look ahead to Friday – we know what will happen – Jesus doesn't give only a measured amount of himself on the cross – he gives us everything. Even unto death. So, we can be safe knowing that the person to whom we are giving everything won't only do the same in return but has already done the same for us. Has already poured out everything, has loved us before we knew what was love.

Take a few moments to sit in silence in the presence of the Lord. Where are you right now? Do you feel able to give him everything? Are you scared of what might happen? Are you holding back? Have you already given everything? Are you already there?

Then listen and pray with this song.

I think it speaks to what we are experiencing right now, in this present time, but also in this time as we are just about to enter this Holiest of weeks, looking towards the hope that is coming.