

“Lent – Signs of the Times – The Shadow”

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Becoming the People of the Resurrection

Read Mark 14:3-9; 12-26

The final shadows immediately prior to the full disclosure of man’s redemption are pictured through two venues: first, Jesus’ anointing at Bethany (Mark 14:3-9) and then, His last Passover in the Upper Room (Mark 14:12-26). All of this will speak to the nature of the offering and the one who offered.

The Anointing

There are several prominent aspects to the initial “shadow”. “The anointing at Bethany is bracketed by two examples of furtiveness and deception. Mark 14:1-2 describes the chief priests and scribes’ desire to arrest Jesus by stealth and then kill him. Mark 14:10-11 relates Judas’ negotiations with the chief priests about betraying Jesus, followed by his search for an opportunity to betray. The juxtaposition of dangerous secrets with the deliberate candor and visibility of the woman with the ointment is striking. She has no fear of approaching Jesus openly; her faith and love propel her forward. In sharp contrast are the chief priests, scribes, and Judas, who cannot face Jesus. Their dishonesty compels them to lurk in the shadows. Perhaps Mark is asking us to examine our ability to face Jesus.”

http://www.mountsaintagnes.org/uploadedFiles/Resources/Research_Papers/In%20Memory%20of%20Her,%20The%20Anointing%20Woman%20-%20Mark%2014.3-9.pdf, “In Memory of Her, The Anointing Woman,” Mark 14:3-9, Brenda M. Johnson, M.A.

First, the event takes place in the home of a “leper” (v. 2). Second, the costly act was rebuffed by some (probably Judas; he held the money [cf. Mark 15:10, 11; John 13:29]). Third, although some shamed her by open indignation and public scolding, Jesus affirms the act and the individual and assures her of renown (v. 6). Fourth, the anointing is in preparation for His burial (v. 8).

Each of the four gospels records an anointing. Matthew, Mark, and John provide complimentary elements to a single story; Luke 7 gives another anointing of a different kind. Our attention is on Mark 14 and the expanding elements provided by Matthew and John.

The context is one of enjoyment, perhaps merriment, but most certainly a relaxed atmosphere established by the meal setting. It is probably safe to assume the disciples picked up the aura of determination and resolve exuded by their Lord. He spoke to this, but they were slow of heart. Both Matthew and Mark spoke of an unknown woman entering into the narrative, but John identified her as Mary. Martha is noted as the one serving and it is Mary who carried out this notable act. Luke 10:38-42 confirms these qualities of the two. Although time and space prohibit, it would be of interest to see how John 12 and Luke 10 intersect as to time and place.

Her act began by pouring a costly ointment over the head of her Lord. The volume of the substance ran down His body to His feet. At that point she lovingly towels His feet with her

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hair. Although it was not her intent to gain from such an act, she does. To anoint one's hair with oil was part of their means of personal hygiene. By honoring Jesus, her head benefits; yet not only does Mary gain from such an act, so do all present. The entire house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume (John 12:3). Almost immediately, as if to show the darker context of ensuing events, there is protest and outcry. Judas, as a thief, is the instigator. He rallies the weak in their protest. O how tragic are those who so easily lead astray and are led astray by those with sinister motives and misplaced zeal.

Jesus sharply rebukes their hypocrisy and establishes the preeminence of her devoted, selfless, and sacrificial act. Jesus rebuts the concern for the poor by noting how the poor are always present and capable of being served, whereas He will soon be gone and this act is in preparation of that moment. Yet the deeper questions persist. Why did **she** do this symbolic and sacrificial act? What did the act cost her personally? Why were some indignant? What does this symbolic and sacrificial act tell us?

Mark's narrative uses powerful words, words such as "very costly perfume of pure nard," "some were indignant," "they were scolding her," "what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her," and "went off in order to betray Him," and "they were glad when they heard this." There is much bare emotion laid before the reader. On what hand we have the abandonment of a broken, but zealous follower. Her worship is uninhibited. It is unashamedly "sloppy". She gives what she deems to be the best of all she possesses in order to honor the one who set her free. We often encounter those who willingly give all they possess in their pursuit of Jesus Christ. This text identifies the cost of the gift as a year's wage. Consider how much we make in one year and would we be willing to give that same substance to Christ and His Church? We are not told of her encounter with Jesus, but it was severe enough to warrant this unrestricted act of adulation. She could give no more than what she gave. All she had was now "wasted" in her service to Jesus.

The menacing hypocrisy of those who scolded her was a dirty endeavor to douse the white flames of her devotion as they exposed their own dead hearts. It was black and dead, empty of virility. Jesus knew and noted the deadness of faith and rebuffed them. He cuddles the warmth of her faith and notes the integrity of the act and guarantees her own renown.

Evil slithered back to the den of vipers and sets in motion the betrayal. In the fullness of time, when everything aligns according to *The Story*, then and only then will each piece be played in its proper place. The anointing is a necessary link in the chain forged for His people to become people of the resurrection.

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