

Bennochy church : 13th March 2016

I want you to imagine the scene. This is a dinner party like no other. It takes place in Bethany, in the home of no other than Lazarus. Just raised from the dead! Never mind it is just before the great feast of Passover. Never mind the fact that Jesus is there. At the table sits none other than Lazarus.

He is the man they are all talking about. Tell me Lazarus, what happened, what did it feel like? Would you not want to ask this guy some questions? He was dead and now he is alive, sitting at the table.

I wonder how felt? The closest example we have are people who have been close to death, but have survived or people who have escaped what seemed to them imminent death. Do you not think that would be part of the table conversation. People gathered, indeed crowding around Lazarus to hear his story. For his family, what a time of rejoicing!

John is not interested in Lazarus. He has had his moment of fame. John instead turns his focus to his sister of Lazarus, Mary. By the way, Martha is in the kitchen and Mary at first glance, wastes a precious resource.

So we turn our eyes away from the story of Lazarus. A greater miracle is about to happen. A resurrected man sits at a table, still very much part of creation. He is but a living parable of the glory to come. Make way, not for the miracle, but the man of

miracles, in whose name this meal is being held. Lazarus is a moment in time. The miracle of the resurrection of Jesus, is about to happen and is for all eternity.

She is extravagant. That is the only word we can use. This is a huge amount of a very expensive perfume. To make his point, John tells us that the smell of the perfume fills the whole house.

In this action we cannot deny the role of Mary. This is the same woman, who through her tears said to Jesus, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. John wants to build up for us, a picture of the kind of person Mary is. What goes before, sets the scene, for her action in the house of Lazarus. As faith shone through her grief, and in spite of her brothers resurrection, there seems to be in Mary a recognition of what is to come, in her act of anointing Jesus. Where's Martha, well her last recorded words, he has been dead four days, there will be a bad smell!

Normal practice was to anoint the head of important guests with oil, and then wash their feet. This story however is all about what is yet to come. We have had a little taste of it in the resurrection of Lazarus, now we come to the main event. Not the power of miracle, but the humility of anointing someone's feet with oil. Death has not yet come, but John says to us, look carefully, it is as sure as the reality of the events of crucifixion to come. Mary in advance, anoints the dead body of Jesus. A king anointed who had to die before entering his kingdom.

Does this story remind you of anything? There are accounts in both the gospels of Mark & Mathew of unnamed woman who do a similar thing, in the house of Simon the leper. The only difference being, it is not his feet that are anointed, but his head. These accounts are of the same story.

What is far more interesting is the story in Luke's gospel at the home of Simon the Pharisee, where a woman who lived a sinful life, possibly a prostitute, and uses her hair as Mary did, as part of her anointing of the feet of Jesus. In these acts of worship, for how else can we understand what is going on here, these women are eternally joined. Sinner and friend, one in their acts of devotion to Jesus.

What does that say about God? Jesus put no barriers in place. We can come to him as both sinner and friend, prostitute and pilgrim. It does not seem to matter.

There is always someone who complains! This time it is Judas Iscariot. Let's be honest, if we can be the person of sin and the friend of Jesus, we can also be Judas. He is not seen in a good light. He is the treasurer. He is trusted. He wants to make sure... there is money left for him. A bit of character assassination before his betrayal of Jesus. After all, says John he was that kind of person. Anything for money!.

Jesus says leave her alone! What she does now, anticipates what is to come. Something far more important than using that

money to help the poor. We need to understand the context of the story. Faith cannot be understood without death and resurrection. Lazarus sits at the table. He points to far greater things to come. He might be the 'talk of the steamie' today, but the greater act was in the hands of a woman, who points forward and does not look back. That is faith.

Jesus said, you will always have the poor with you. That is true, but today you have witnessed a greater truth. To sit not at this table with Lazarus, in this moment, but to be part of the Kingdom of God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and for all eternity. Amen.