

Reflections for Holy Week

for Christians Worshipping God Together : Apart

Journey through a week filled with emotion and satisfying our senses with scent and touch and taste

Monday

Lord God of all time,
you whose Son worshipped in your Temple,
we come to worship you *now*, in another time
and a different place, in our homes,
where heaven and earth are joined in prayer and praise.
Come close to us as we approach you today,
meet us as we worship
and speak *your* words of *life* and *love* for all to *our* hearts.
Amen



image: lent-clip-art570282

Yesterday was Palm Sunday when we remembered Jesus arriving in Jerusalem to the joy of the crowd, a King arriving in peace, on a donkey.

But, what was going on during the days between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday – the Last Supper? Jesus and his disciples weren't just in Jerusalem for a family get-together for Passover and a bit of sight-seeing. So, what was going on?

Jesus' first port of call in Jerusalem was the Temple.

The Gospel writer, Matthew, tells us what happened there:-

Matthew 21: 12 - 17 – *Jesus tips up the tables in the Temple*

¹² Jesus went into the Temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying things there. He turned over the tables that belonged to those who were exchanging different kinds of money. And he turned over the benches of those who were selling doves.

¹³ Jesus said to them, “The Scriptures say, ‘My Temple will be called a house of prayer.’ But you are changing it into a ‘hiding place for thieves.’”

¹⁴ Some blind people and some who were crippled came to Jesus in the Temple area. Jesus cured them.

¹⁵ The leading priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he was doing. And they saw the children praising him in the Temple area. The children were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”

All this made the priests and the teachers of the law angry.

¹⁶ They asked Jesus, “Do you hear what these children are saying?”

He answered, “Yes. The Scriptures say, ‘You have taught children and babies to give praise.’ Have you not read that Scripture?”

Reflection

The *second* time my mum ever visited a market stall was also the *last* time she ever visited a market stall!

It was to complain about the purchase she’d made the day before – the first time she’d ever bought anything from a market stall!

Having been persuaded by my Auntie Dorothy to buy vegetables from the market, because they were cheaper, my mum decided to do just that.

All well and good, you might think, and it was, until she took some potatoes out of the large brown paper bag to peel. She peeled 2 or 3 potatoes, but on picking up the next potato she said – Victor Meldrew style – “I don’t believe it, it’s a stone! It’s not a potato it’s a stone!”

Well the weighing scales came out and she weighed a potato that looked about the same size as the stone, and then the stone and – what do you know – the stone was heavier. She’d been duped, swindled by the market-stall holder out of a measure equivalent to a very large potato.

Not much of an issue you might think, but enough to send my mum back to the market the next day to complain.

Well, what if the man was regularly putting a heavy stone in bags of potatoes? Some might think, well it's not much of a loss, but each loss to the customer was a gain to the stallholder as far as she was concerned.

He was trading using unfair measures, cheating people out of food they had bought in good faith. This was just the sort of unfair trade that mum had feared from Market traders – and, I'm afraid, market traders were not to be trusted again!

I can vividly recall my mum discussing the potato that was in fact a stone with the market stall holder! It was an embarrassing episode for a young girl, but typical of my mum, who wouldn't stand for anything she considered to be unfair.

This potato debacle brought to life the story of Jesus turning the tables for me. Like me, my mum was a great believer in the importance of fairness and trade justice, a stone is not a potato! A stone is easy to lay your hands on, it takes no effort to produce and it weighs more than a potato – a stone is a false measure.

Like Jesus, she and I would have been outraged by the sort of behaviour in the Temple forecourt and the inflated charges levied on animals and doves bought there for sacrifice, allegedly to ensure their 'suitability' to God as a 'blemish-free offering'.

The Temple was a Holy place, the place where heaven and earth met, the place where the Lord resided, a place of worship, a place so Holy that only the purest of priests was allowed into the innermost place, the Holy of Holies, to 'approach' God.

The outer court, where the trading was occurring, was supposed to be a place for prayer for *all* – Jews *and* Gentiles, men *and* women. But that function was being squeezed out by trading. How was it possible to pray amidst the commotion of market trading?

Jesus was causing controversy again, upsetting the religious leaders.

He really wasn't doing himself any favours!

And this is just one of the controversial things you'll find happening between Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and his arrest.

Lord God,
we lift before you in prayer all those who struggle to find peace and those who suffer under the unjust practices of other.

Amen

Tuesday

- *Spray a bit of your favourite scent, or aftershave in the room and let the fragrance of it help you to focus as you pray.*

Prayer

Loving God, how lavishly you pour out
the costly gift of your grace upon us.

Fill our homes and our lives with the fragrance of your love.

Yours is the abundant fragrance of life itself,

the pure essence of God

distilled and presented in one

astonishing aroma.

As we worship you,

we open the scent bottle

and the scent fragrances everything it

touches.

It spreads and lingers and rubs off from

one wearer to the next,

so that you will be glorified. Amen

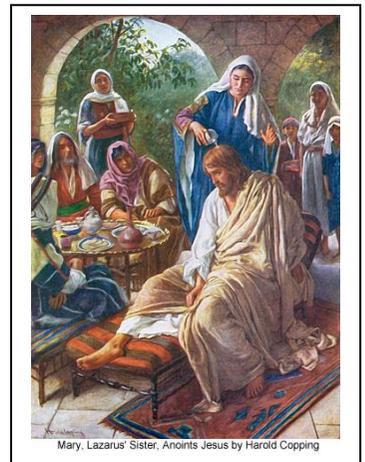


image: Painting by Harold Copping

Matthew 26: 6 - 13 – *A woman anoints Jesus' head with costly perfume*

Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper.

⁷ While he was there, a woman came to him. She had an alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. She poured the perfume on Jesus' head while he was eating.

⁸ The Disciples saw the woman do this and were upset at her. They said, “Why waste that perfume? ⁹ It could be sold for a lot of money, and the money could be given to those who are poor.”

¹⁰ But Jesus knew what happened. He said, “Why are you bothering this woman? She did a very good thing for me. ¹¹ You will always have the poor with you. But you will not always have me. ¹² This woman poured perfume on my body. She did this to prepare me for burial after I die. ¹³ The Good News will be told to people all over the world. And I can assure you that everywhere the Good News is told, the story of what this woman did will also be told, and people will remember her.”

What extravagance! The disciples are *not* impressed.

If Jesus has taught them *anything*, he has taught them to embrace the poor and the marginalised of society. But now, for some reason, Jesus isn't batting an eyelid at the expense of this perfume, poured on his head. He's not only *allowing* it, he's *condoning* it.

According to Matthew's account of the days between Palm Sunday and Jesus' arrest, these and other controversial teachings and activities seem to seal his fate.

It's following the anointing of Jesus' head with costly perfume that the angry Judas heads off to meet with the chief priests, to agree terms and betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

So, we have two 'controversies' and *also* two 'calls to worship'.

The Temple forecourts were intended to be places of prayer and worship.

Jesus clearly hadn't taken the appropriate 'how to win friends and influence people' course! His criticism of the priestly-sanctioned business deals going on there were a clear example to the powers that be of his rebel rousing, trouble causing ways. He had to be stopped. He was upsetting the balance of power.

In this *later* controversy, Jesus seems to the disciples to be condoning a costly outpouring of love and gratitude at the expense of the poor. And they *don't* like it.

But these 'incidents' can also be read as 'calls to *worship*'.

The Temple forecourt was intended as a place of prayer for *all* nations. It was known as the court of the Gentiles, intended for anyone and everyone as a place of prayer. But business had squeezed this 'inclusive' opportunity for prayer out, and Jesus wanted that space to be re-established as a place for prayer for everyone - a call to *worship* God.

In Simon's house, with the pungent smell of the perfume filling the room and their nostrils, with the disciples' 'practical' sense ringing in his ears and with the woman's touch as she anoints his head, Jesus reminds the disciples to focus on him and the sacrifice he's going to make.

The woman (we aren't given her name, so we can't be sure what she's grateful for) has come to *worship*, to thank Jesus for whatever it is he's done for her, but whatever it is, she's recognised the call to worship and located her worship and adoration precisely in Jesus, in this costly outpouring which *mirrors* Jesus' costly outpouring for *us*.

These 'calls to worship' are as relevant today as they were then.

Worship must be made possible for all people, it must be unhindered. And it is located in Jesus, for all that he has done for humankind, opening up the way to know God – and live.

Mindful of the woman (in other Gospel accounts she's known as Mary) and Judas and all that took place in Simon's home that night, we reflect on times when we have been critical of those who worship in ways that we do not, or when we have condemned the way others spend their time, or their money.

- *So take a moment of quiet to think on these things before God in prayer.*

Keep a Silence.....

Gracious God, as the woman anointed your head with perfume, as she glimpsed the precious nature of your calling, so may we, who know that your head will be crowned with thorns at Calvary anoint you with tears of penitence for our part in your suffering, and with thankfulness as we glimpse the extravagance of your love – love that braved even the cross of suffering and death for us. Amen

And so, we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing - *2 Corinthians 2:15*

Wednesday

Have you ever noticed that there are little pictures, or symbols on each different colour of ‘Jelly Baby’? Each symbol can help us to tell people about the wonderful love of God that Jesus taught us about and helped us to understand. So, here goes:-

When you lick the coating off the **Black** Jelly Baby, you can see a **heart**, which reminds us of God’s great love for us.

You'll see that the **Green** Jelly baby is **crying** - rubbing his eye, which reminds us that God is sad when we are sad and because he's sad that the world is hurting too.

On the tummy of the **Red** Jelly Baby, you'll see the letter '**B**' which stands for 'Brilliant' which reminds us that God thinks we are all special, we are 'brilliant' in God's eyes and Jesus loves each and every one of us enough to die for us because he thinks we are all brilliant, or 'beloved'.

The **Pink** Jelly Baby *is* a **baby** with a frilly cap, which reminds us that we are all God's children, each of us is a "child of God", no matter who we are, or where we come from – and God wants us to know that..

The **Yellow** Jelly Baby is wearing a **necklace**, which represents the treasures of Heaven, and that each of us is a precious treasure to God.

The **Orange** Jelly Baby is carrying a **bag** - perhaps it's a 'grab bag', packed with all the essentials (soap, disinfectant and toilet rolls!) for *any* eventuality - which reminds us that we need to be **ready - spiritually ready and prepared**. We should *always* be ready to follow Jesus, wherever he leads us, and live, following his example in our words and actions.

The chapters between Jesus turning the tables and the occasion in Simon's house, when the woman poured costly ointment on Jesus' head, deal with Jesus teaching his disciples that they must always be prepared, they should not be caught napping, they must be like the Orange Jelly Baby - or the wise bridesmaids!

Matthew 25: 1 - 13 – *The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*

25 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this.

Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

³ When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them;

⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps.

⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept.

⁶ But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."

⁷ Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps.

⁸ The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out."

⁹ But the wise replied, “No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.”

¹⁰ And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

¹¹ Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, “Lord, lord, open to us.” ¹² But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I do not know you.”

¹³ Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Next time you eat ‘**Jelly Babies**’ – remember to *look* at them and *think* about what each one means - and don’t forget the advice of the Orange Jelly Baby - be prepared!

- *Teach your children and your grandchildren about God’s great love using Jelly Babies*

Prayer of Readiness

Lord, our God, help us to prepare,
and help us to be ready to receive Christ
and to share in the banquet of heaven,
May he not catch us napping,

may he find us waiting eagerly to follow Christ's leading
Amen



I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (*Psalm 119: 102 - 103*)

O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. Amen (*Psalm 34: 8*)

Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

Minister of the SPACE Group of Churches - April 2022