



Passion Sunday - Mark 14: 1 – 15: 47

The Anointing...

The warm afternoon air began to cool as the shadows on the walls of Simon's house softened in the golden light of approaching sunset. Jesus and the Disciples were listening to Simon re-tell the story of the ghastly years when he was unclean with leprosy. Simon's glowing complexion was bronzed in the golden light as he told how Jesus' miraculous healing had restored his health. Simon continued, describing how he had also reclaimed his former wealth. His grateful glances honored Jesus.

Staying at Simon's home in Bethany had been a great blessing for Jesus and the Disciples. Jerusalem was a madhouse. The streets were jammed with thousands of pilgrims who poured through its gates to celebrate the feasts of the Passover and the Unleavened Bread. As Simon's honored guests, Jesus and his friends reclined at the table which soon would be filled with good things to eat. Jesus eased himself back onto the cushions and studied the deepening colors of the western sky.

One of Simon's servants interrupted to announce that a woman had come with perfume for Jesus.

"Bring her to us," Simon ordered, waving for her to enter.

When the servant brought the woman to the doorway of the room, she stood there, searching for Jesus among the fourteen faces who looked up at her. She was cradling a white alabaster jar with both of her hands. Recognizing Jesus she moved boldly toward him. "May I anoint you, Lord?" she asked.

Jesus opened his hands to her in assent. She knelt by him and broke the top seal of the jar. The scent of the fine oil floated out to the Disciples who silently watched as she smoothed the oil onto Jesus' face and forehead.

"This is like the anointing of Jehu," one of the Disciples said, recalling the ancient Prophet Elisha's directions for anointing Jehosaphat's son as king of Israel.

As the woman continued to anoint Jesus feet and the rest of his body, Judas grumbled, "What is the point of this extravagant waste of perfume?" The entire jar was now used on Jesus. "It could have been sold for a year's wages and given to the poor!"

"Why do you criticize her?" Jesus asked. "She has done me a kindness. The poor you will always have with you and you can be generous to them whenever you wish. You will not always have me."

None of the Disciples could look him in the eye when Jesus explained that the woman had just anointed his body for burial.

The silent men all stared at their hands, except for Judas who had risen to his feet and was edging toward the door.



The story of the kingly anointing at Bethany prepares us for Jesus' kingly entry into Jerusalem amid the palms. The anointing as a preparation for burial prepares us for the awful reality that Jesus will be betrayed. These contrasts reveal the good and evil which is a part of human life. This calls us to deep reflection on our place in the Passion story. Are we the woman who brought the precious oils? Are we one of the disciples, even Judas, or perhaps part of the condemning crowd?