



Sermon for the Lenten Service 1 (16 February 2018)

Greeting: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

• **The Reading for this Devotion is written in Mk 14, 1-11:**

• **ESV 1** It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him,

• **2** for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

• **3** And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, 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 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."

• **10** Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.

• **11** And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray Him.

• *(Here ends the reading: O Christ, the Lamb of God, ...)*

• ***Dear Brothers and Sisters under the Cross of Christ!***

• One of the major turning points in the relationship between Jesus and the chiefpriests and scribes is highlighted by the Gospel of Mark as being the remark Jesus makes concerning their seeking for a sign from heaven! Jesus responded [8,12-13]: "*And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." And he left them,"*

• Then Jesus proceeded to warn His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees

and the leaven of Herod. This generation who wants signs first and then faith are the leaven which infiltrates the whole lump. Beware of that leaven which contaminates the whole church!

• What a truly prophetic warning, as we are today flooded with the signs and wonders movements where so many prophets use prophetic signs to authorize themselves and for outreach purposes. That is the claim. Yet Jesus says, there will be no sign given!

• At that time, the disciples didn't understand what Jesus was saying when He spoke about the leaven. Jesus was speaking of the teaching of the scribes and chiefpriests that centered around seeing is believing. If we keep this in mind much of what happens in the final stages of the drama will make sense.

• And we find, that the chiefpriests and the scribes were making plans to arrest Jesus to kill Him! They wanted to protect their teaching by all means possible, by eliminating the one person threatening to overthrow their whole teaching paradigm!

• And yes, you see, there she comes- the chiefpriests would have reasoned like this- someone who was already influenced by Jesus' teaching, a woman, who came to the meal Jesus had at Simon the leper's house, and what does she do, she does something crazy, she pours out the most expensive oil onto His head. All of it, the whole flask!

• For us, truly astonishing: How does she know who Jesus is without receiving a sign from heaven first? Just by the Word? How terrible, she wasted so much money on Him, thoughts of Jesus' disciples!

• How does she know? What does she know, which all others didn't get, yes all other men, scribes and chiefpriests including the disciples of Jesus. They also, at this late stage were still blind to what was going on. There was trust in Jesus, but they didn't see clearly yet.

• But this woman, do you see, there you have it, she believes Jesus without a sign from heaven! She believes without seeing! The Sanhedrin would argue, that is why we need to kill this Jesus. He is causing havoc amongst our people! He is the deceiver! That's what they reckoned, He drives out demons, by Beelzebul.

• The disciples, on the other hand reckon, why is she wasting all this money which could have gone to the poor!

• So, what unfolds, what happens with Jesus is ambiguous to human

understanding. They all see the same things. But neither the disciples nor the Sanhedrin get what is going on! Jesus alone gives the right interpretation of what is happening in reality and what this woman did to Him- she anointed Jesus' body for burial. There wouldn't be enough time later on.

• So, what people see is not what it seems. Unless Jesus interprets what happens we cannot use anything that happens for proof for anything.

• Seeing and interpreting what happens before our eyes, by ourselves, is not reliable, neither as disciple nor as an expert in Jewish religious traditions. Only the Word of Jesus gives light. Faith in Him and that is hearing His Word lets us see what happened truly. Faith comes from hearing- its a present tense verb. Our faith lives from the Word of Christ, just like our body lives by the food and water we take in! Both physical and spiritual food come from the outside of ourselves and nourishes us, and gives us life.

• The remark of Jesus confirms this, "*wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her*". Those who proclaim and believe the Gospel will realise, will see, what beautiful honour she has given to the Body of Jesus and will acknowledge what she has done on our behalf!

• The astonishing part is of course the fact that Jesus' own disciples got it all wrong. They were not against Jesus. They were with Him, but nevertheless, whenever they interpreted something using their own logic, they got it all wrong. That is, being a Christian does not mean that everything you hear in your head or think about a certain situation guarantees that you interpret the situation correctly and that it must come from God. Unless you have a clear Word from Jesus, from the Scriptures, telling you how to interpret that situation, you should not claim- the Lord says- so and so with regard to droughts or politics or signs of the endtimes.

• Abiding in Christ means, to only say what Jesus says, to listen first to what He says, and then you can proclaim what He says, in private or in public depending on your vocation.

• The disciples had the Word of Jesus on this. Three times did He prophesy that He will suffer and die and resurrect on the third day. Yet, they didn't believe Him although they were His disciples!

• And the proof of this follows immediately, as we see the next action taking place: One of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests in order to hand Jesus over! One of the Twelve is a full-blown hypocrite. A hypocrite is some-one who seems to be on the side of Jesus, but is in fact against Him. There is no neutral ground. A hypocrite pretends to be a Christian, but is in fact against Christ.

• This act of treason was the source of joy to the chief priests and they were prepared to reward it with money, the highest good in their world!

• And so we see the drama unfolding enlightened by the Holy Spirit's Word. Two worlds, so very different, about to clash in Jerusalem and its outskirts.

• Only question that remains is, where are you, where am I in this drama? With whom do you associate, with the Jewish leader corps, with the disciples who complain about the act of the woman, or maybe with the woman who anointed Jesus? Are you fine with Jesus' Word? I hope and trust that you all will identify with the woman, that she did not only do the right thing, but a most beautiful and honourable thing on behalf of all believers in Christ!

• Our greatest concern as baptised Christians should be that we could be like Judas! A hypocrite! Me? How would I know? Well, as you heard this story on whose side were you? Whom did you try to defend, try to justify? That is what this Gospel does. It reveals to us where we stand with regard to Jesus. It does so in full honesty so that there is time to repent, time to turn around and begin to listen to how Jesus interprets the drama.

• If you hear what Jesus says and go along with what He says, if you rejoice with Jesus about what the woman did to His body and see how this had its place in God's planing, then you are on His side. Then this Word of the Gospel made you firmer in your faith towards Him. You have clearly taken sides.

• Now, confess it to the world, without fear, because this plan of God spells suffering and death for Jesus, but it is LIFE for us and for the dying world. Glory be to Jesus! **Amen.**

• *The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*