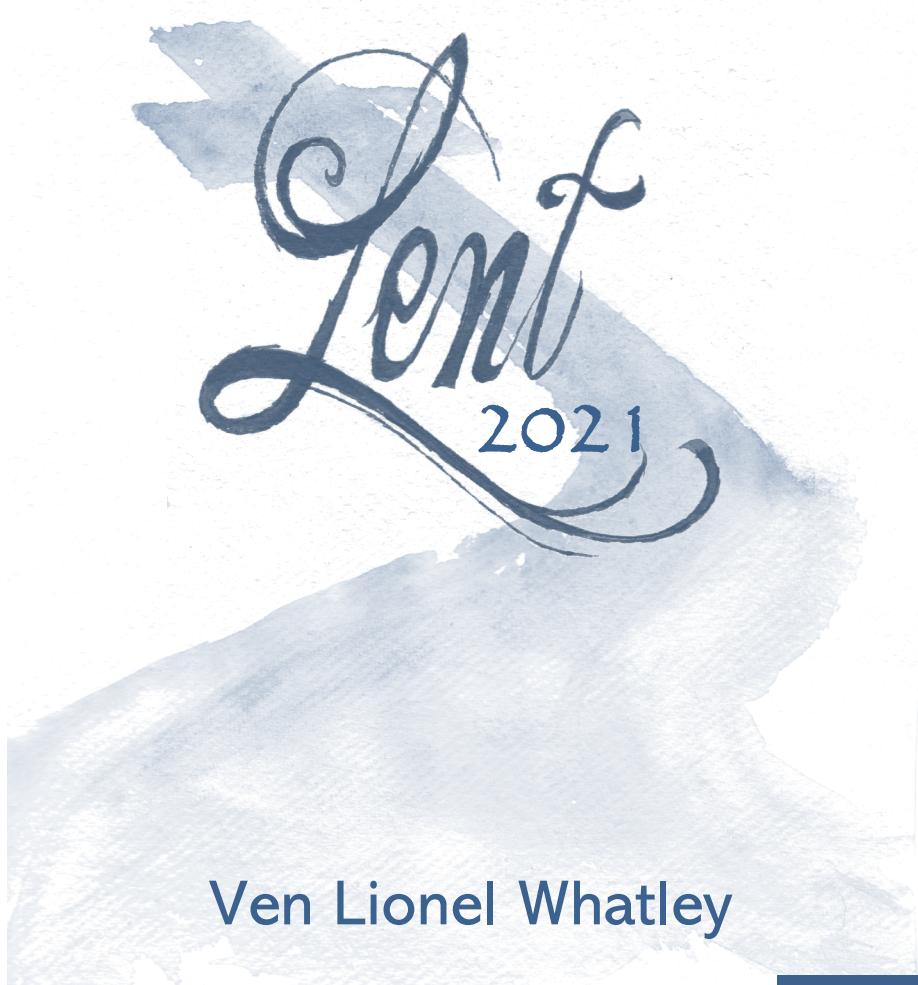


Walking with Jesus

on the road to the cross



Lent
2021

Ven Lionel Whatley

Week 5

Mothering Sunday

Scripture

Matthew 26:6-16

Generosity versus Greed

We don't know much about Simon, but Jesus is in his home. Matthew tells us that Simon was a leper. I suppose that Jesus must've healed Simon, because normally someone with leprosy wouldn't be able to eat with others.

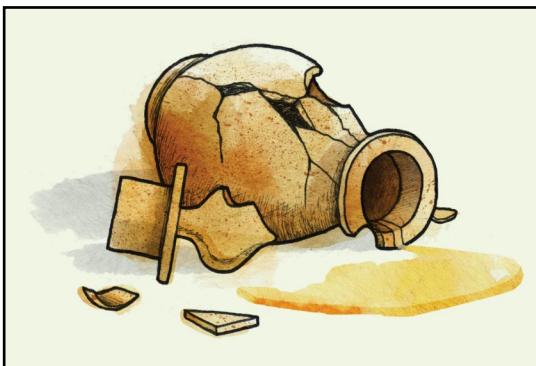
They were sitting at the table when a woman came in with a large jar of expensive

perfume. The value was 400 denarii (a denarius was one day's wage) so it was worth a year's wages. She smashed the jar and began to pour the perfume over him. It was the most amazing and moving act. John tells us that the woman was Mary of Bethany. This precious perfume, we are told in Mark

and John, was nard, and was used to anoint kings or kept for preparing the body for burial. In her love for Jesus, Mary pours out every last drop of this precious nard as an act of worship.

Today on Mothering Sunday we think of the selfless love and devotion which women all over the world have poured out towards their children, grandchildren, the orphan, the refugee,

the neighbour in need. We give thanks to God for all mothers everywhere as they cope with the challenges of these times.



Prayer

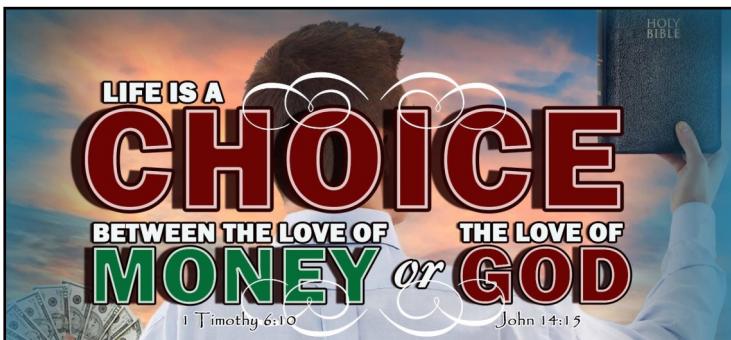
Today we thank you Lord for the generous, self-giving love of our mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, those women who have mentored, nurtured, taught us over the years and whom we remember before you today.

A beautiful act

Contrast this beautiful act of worship and devotion with the reaction of the disciples. Matthew tells us that when the disciples saw this they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked (Matthew.26:8). How could they be so blind and callous? Why had she seen what they failed to see? Jesus, however, sees the true value of her love and he says four things about her gift.

3 She had done a most discerning thing. She was anointing his body for burial, something that nobody would be able to do because, normally, the relatives were not allowed to bury the body after a crucifixion.

4 Jesus says that she has done something memorable and he predicted that wherever the Gospel was preached, people would hear about her. Which is happening as we read this story!



1 He says that it was a beautiful act.

2 He also made it clear that she had done a very opportune thing; she had seized an opportunity that she would never have again; a unique once-in-a-life-time act. Jesus knew, as the disciples could not yet grasp, that his death was imminent.

Prayer

Father, forgive us when we criticise the love of others for you because it seems ‘over the top’. Forgive us for seeing things from a materialistic point of view and selfishly holding onto the gifts that you have given us. Give us a generous spirit so that we are happy to share whatever we have with others.

What is your legacy?

In contrast to the beautiful, generous act of worship by Mary of Bethany we have the meanness of the disciples and then a dreadful story of greed and treachery.

Judas, one of the twelve, Matthew reminds us, seizes the opportunity to betray Jesus. Mary's act and Jesus' response had somehow tipped him over the edge and from that moment on he sought the opportunity to betray him (Matthew 26:16). He had lived with Jesus and the others. He had seen all that Jesus did and taught and had gone along with Jesus, hoping that when Jesus brought about his kingdom he (Judas) would be rich and influential.

We are told that Judas was the

treasurer and that he was a thief. But Jesus saw through his covetousness and greed. He said to the disciples, "Have I not chosen you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." (John 6:70) His life would be tragic, and in despair he would hang himself. What a heritage.

Mary would be remembered for all time for her love and generosity and Judas would be remembered for greed and

treachery. What will we be remembered for?

Prayer

Lord, it's so easy to judge. Sometimes we have to admit that we behave just like Judas. He reminds us too much of ourselves. There is often the same kind of selfishness and greed in us that was in him.

In your love and mercy, cleanse us from selfish ambition and give us a new, clean heart.



Pray against evil

I've often wondered what those priests thought of the followers of Jesus after that. Would they say, "Just grease their palms with silver and you can buy them off"?



Don't we often hear people say, "They're just like everyone else. They call themselves Christians!" Yes, it is sad when a disciple does fall into sin. We need the grace and love of our fellow believers to pick us up. Remember that Judas was at the Last Supper, he ate with Jesus and his brother disciples, and he went out from that meal to betray the One who loved him and had to let him go.

(Matthew 26:14-16)

Judas started well, even preaching the Gospel and healing in Jesus' name, and looked after the distribution of money to the poor. However, there was something eating away at his soul. He loved money and, gradually, this swallowed up his spiritual life and he began to help himself from the money purse. His ambition was no longer to serve and please Jesus but to get rich.

That can happen to anyone! Eventually he had gone so far down that road that the devil could take possession of his heart. Jesus said, "One of you is a devil!" The devil had entered Judas' heart as his actions and choices showed. We need to start each day with prayer, especially for guidance and protection from all the schemes of the evil one.

Prayer

Father, we pray for those who once walked with you and sadly no longer do. Think of family and friends you know and pray for them at this point. Thank you Lord that you never stop loving us.

Light in the darkness

This story of one woman's love and devotion is squeezed in between two awful events: the treachery of the chief priests and the leaders of the people who met at the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, and decided to have Jesus arrested and killed (Matthew 26:3-5) and the betrayal of Judas (Matthew 26:14-16). Why does Matthew

place it here? Maybe he wants to show us that there was still some light in the darkness.

In the next two chapters we will see Jesus betrayed by one of his own, and then when you think that it can't get any worse, one of his 'inner circle', Peter 'the Rock', denies knowing him. All his disciples will abandon him for fear of being killed, the Jewish leadership will condemn him, Pilate will sentence him to death by Roman crucifixion. He will be insulted, mocked, beaten and

spat on and finally abandoned by God! Wow, that's a lot of darkness. In fact, darkness covers the land as Jesus finally lays down his life.

And yet out of the gloom, Mary recognises him for who he really is. She hails him as King, as Lord, as Saviour, and as Friend, and she expresses her devotion through a costly, but appropriate, act of worship.



Prayer

Lord we can see why you want this love story to be part of your Gospel message to the world. Mary's hard travelled all the way from India, but what she did with it must travel to every nation of the earth. May our love stories ring out to your glory and may many remember the generosity and kindness of so many who, especially during this pandemic, have risked their lives to help and heal others.

Focus on Jesus

Judas goes to the priests and agrees to sell our Lord for the price of a slave. Judas was in fact selling himself. In Hebrew culture, thirty pieces of silver was a lot of money. In fact, it was the exact price paid to the master of a slave in compensation if his slave was killed by an ox. (Exodus 21:32.)

It has become fashionable in some quarters to whitewash Judas and pretend that he was shrewd and clever, with all the qualities to be the ‘businessman of the year’.

We will never know why Judas did what he did. Some have suggested that it might have been that the love of money had eaten into his soul and he was prepared to do anything for money, even sell his own soul. (John 12:4-6; 1 Timothy. 6:10.) Maybe, his motivation was political. Maybe he was disappointed that Jesus was not the king whom he had hoped would defeat the Romans. Maybe Jesus wasn't the Messiah he had hoped for.

We may feel that we're not like Judas at all, but if there's



anything in our lives that can eat away at our spiritual life until we have lost our love for Jesus, and our understanding of his truth, then we are doing what Judas did. We will all, including Judas, stand before God's throne of judgement.

Prayer

Dear Lord, please help us to keep our hearts and minds focussed on you and your Word. Increase our love for you and our understanding of your truth. We pray for those who have fallen away because of their experience of Christian leaders, the church, suffering or any other reason. Only you can reach them by your Holy Spirit. We pray for them and for ourselves that, as a Church, we will be loving, non-judgemental and compassionate. Amen.

Value hospitality

The closing chapters of Matthew's gospel will draw in various extra people. Matthew brings them in and they each have their say. The whole of the 'establishment' comes out in full force against Jesus.

The central characters like Caiaphas and Peter, and the walk-on parts like Pilate's wife and the servant girl who points at Peter, Simon of Cyrene and the pair crucified alongside Jesus, are all drawn into the drama. The Jewish religious leadership want him dead because he challenges their power and has captured the imagination of the crowds. Things begin to move at a pace from here on.

This dinner party is the last supper before the Last Supper. It shows how Jesus valued those moments spent with people in their homes. After a hectic few days of teaching and preaching, the hustle and bustle of the Passover Festival, the jostling crowds, the noise, it must have been an oasis of calm for Jesus

and his disciples to relax over a meal in Simon's home. Let's never underestimate the value of hospitality. May our homes (when lockdowns are lifted!) be places where people are welcomed, can meet and be refreshed, and friendship and fellowship shared over a coffee or a meal!



Prayer

Dear Lord, you call us your friend. Help us to remember that you, when you were on earth, loved to meet together with your friends and your disciples. Thank you for the interactions that happened over a meal. Help us as a Church to be hospitable. Thank you for our homes, large or small. Fill them with your presence. Amen.