

3-9 April 2022      John 12:1-8

It just pours

Read the passage from John. It is written below.

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

### Notes on the Bible reading

This is one of those stories that can be overlaid and obscured by all manner of applications. For instance, it has been used as a justification for not addressing injustice, by saying: 'Jesus said that the poor will be always with us, so that's just a fact of life that we cannot change'. It has also been used as a justification for grand church buildings: 'Jesus was pleased when the perfume was lavished on him, so he must be pleased when we spend our money on this silver or oak to show how much we love him'. These applications sometimes feel so pushy that we can find ourselves siding with Judas and wanting to object – why was this not sold and the money given to the poor? Why do we have to cope with this irrational and troublesome action?

Perhaps one place to start is to see this as a specific story, happening at a specific time, not a general piece of teaching about wealth. When Jesus says, 'Leave her alone' (v.7), perhaps he means exactly that: stop bullying her, and recognise her gift of love as I do. This is not a theoretical discussion of what to do with wealth, it is a moment of inarticulate, lavish, embarrassing love; the action of a woman whose devotion overrides her sense of propriety. The cost of the perfume is hard to estimate in today's money, but if we take the fact that a denarius is referred to as a day's wage for a labourer (cf. Matthew 20.2; John 12.5), then 300 denarii is close to a year's salary at a basic level – a massively extravagant ointment to pour out! Like the pearl merchant who sells everything to buy one pearl, and like the Pharisee who gives up his career, Mary of Bethany gives her all.

## Reflection

### Questions for reflection

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

In many English translations, some words of John's Gospel are put in brackets. Here, there are usually brackets around Judas' motivations. He is described as 'the one who was about to betray' Jesus, someone who does not really care about the poor, but wants to steal the money. On the surface, Judas' objections and questions sound reasonable – underneath, there lurk darker motivations. How often is this true of us? Do we find ways to take the moral high ground? What is hidden within our brackets? Are we too quick to rubbish other people's motives? Do we find it difficult to recognise thankfulness and to share it?

### Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.*



- How does this painting make you feel?
- What things, big or little, make you glad to be alive?
- How can we express our thankfulness so that it 'rubs off' on others?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

Loving God, we thank you for your love for us, and we thank you for each other.

Loving God, as your love pours into our lives,  
help us to show and share it with those outside our circle.

Be with us wherever we go.

**Amen.**

## A prayer to end the Bible study

Amazing God,

we are so thankful for the gift of being alive!

Help us to live aware of all the wonder living brings.

May our thankfulness to you pour out in our actions,

in our choices, in our dealings with other people,

in all that we do. **Amen.**