

'She has done a beautiful thing to me'

Mark 14:3-9. Matthew 26:6-13. John 12:1-7



Easter 1997. After successful surgery for cancer 2 years previously my sister was diagnosed with secondaries of the brain. Within days, paralysis crept up her legs and, given three weeks to live, she was admitted to our local cottage hospital. She lived for seven months - her wonderful, good sense of humour helped her to cope with paralysis from the waist down and the indignities that went with it. Her unwavering faith convinced everyone who looked after, or visited her, that death was not a problem for her. She passed away peacefully 7 months later in the last week of November.

The day before she died I visited my sister-in-law who was ill. As I walked over the railway crossing that divided the road where we lived I met a bewildered florist. He inquired if there was another road of the same name in the town. I assured him he had not made a mistake and that he would find the road continued over the other side of the crossing and there was no need to drive his van round to the other side. He was carrying a wicker basket arranged with dark mauve buddleias and lilies. I can remember watching him as he walked across the railway line and saying to myself 'Lord, I wonder if that you are going to take my sister to be with you.'

When I returned home the basket was in the front porch. Early the next morning my sister's suffering was over as she passed through death to be with her Saviour. I used the basket arrangement for the church flowers at her memorial service as it was too painful to keep them for myself.

Some wonderful phrases have touched me as I have reread the Easter story. I cannot imagine hearing Jesus say of me 'She has done a beautiful thing to me....wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.' I would however, dearly wish that I could hear Jesus say those same words about me.

Jesus death by crucifixion would take place at the end of the week. He would die condemned as a blasphemer – a criminal – and not merit a state funeral neither the official anointing of a Jewish body in preparation for burial. Yet here, in the company of the disciples and others, Mary anoints Jesus with expensive perfume – 'she has poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.' Joseph, a disciple of Jesus and a rich man would be placing Jesus' body in his own specially prepared tomb at the end of the crucifixion. For some, nothing was too much to give to Jesus to meet his requirements. It

was Mary's act of love that Jesus described as a 'beautiful thing.'

There is another account of Jesus having his feet washed. This time by a sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50. 'She stood behind Jesus – so as not to draw attention to herself - '...weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured ointment over them'.

The host, Simon, a Pharisee reacted strongly: - if Jesus is who he says he is then he would know that the woman touching him is a sinner! Simon was right but also sadly wrong for he missed the point which is so obvious in Jesus' reply, 'I came into your house. You did not give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.'

Jesus acknowledged that her extravagant display of love to him showed how much forgiveness she had accepted for herself. 'I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.

Mary and the sinful woman had hearts full of love for Jesus. Nothing was too much for them to show their gratitude to him. Pure motives expressed sincere love. Perhaps that is the secret if we are to hear Jesus say to us, 'You have done a beautiful thing to me.'

For others, it gave opportunity to show their punitive attitudes towards, not only Jesus, but also those who loved him. How easy it is to stand on the fence and criticise - sometimes with arguments and justifications that miss the point but make our lack of care reasonable to us. Today we can show our love for Jesus as we care for others and accept their love for us.



Easter focuses on the cross of Jesus and an empty tomb. Redemptive love revealing God's love through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus so that we could have forgiveness and a meaningful life on earth and have eternal life thereafter.

Jesus' farewell to this woman can be ours too 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Mark 10:45 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many'

Romans 6:23 'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.'