

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups July 6th 2008

'Being Witnesses...with Jesus at a Dinner Party'

John Chapter 12:1-11



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

So here is another story of being together in the presence of Jesus. Last week we heard the full story of the raising of Lazarus at Bethany, and this next episode is a meal prepared in Jesus' honour. The meal takes place in Lazarus' home, and at some point Mary of Bethany takes a jar of expensive perfume and uses it to anoint Jesus' feet. This, it seems, was an act of considerable extravagance, considering the reaction that she gets.

Such perfumes were a treasure of kings, and Amos denounced the luxury and opulence of Israel in the 7th c, BC (6:6). Perhaps it's on that basis that Judas complains about the waste, suggesting that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. There is an amount of money mentioned – three hundred Denarii, which would have been more than a year's wages. However, Judas, who held the purse, apparently had a habit of dipping into it whenever he fancied, so that may have been his motivation instead. However, Jesus rebukes Judas, because Mary's act was made from the goodness of her heart.

Mary was a follower of Jesus and she would have known his teachings about money, and how it can corrupt people and lead them away from God. Yet Mary had an item that cost a great deal of money. Of course, just owning something expensive is not the issue here. In fact Jesus didn't speak out against riches themselves, but rather he condemned the attitude that surrounds the accumulation and self-centered attitude that often accompanies personal wealth. Perhaps Mary saw in herself something of that, and felt that it was a matter of shame. Her very act of pouring something so valuable on Jesus feet took away its intrinsic value; 'this is worthless compared to Lord'. The love was in the attitude of *giving* something so precious, and that is what Jesus saw and Judas didn't.

Many of us will have been touched when others gave to us out of sheer unconditional love. What was given was almost of secondary importance. Remember the old sayings: 'it's the thought that counts', or 'it's always the little things that mean the most'. As Christian people, such a giving attitude should be a part of our life and witness. But our first love must be with Jesus our Lord, because he gave us his *whole life*, in love for us all (Jn 3:16). What better example could we have been given? We have been called to continue the same (Mt 10:8). In a sense, we are all still at the dinner party, which continues throughout the ages. Whenever we meet together to share the Holy Communion, we are receiving Jesus' unconditional love, and we depart with commitment to take the same love to all others.

'Send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory'.



Witness: questions to discuss:

1. Share a few stories about extravagant gestures of love you have made, or of others you know.
2. Christians and money has always been an area of tension. Do money and possessions make it hard for us to live the Christian life? Are we always defined by what we have?
3. How can we emphasise the love in our giving, rather than the content? What does this mean in terms of Christian witness?
4. Prayerfully consider the treasures in your heart. What does it actually mean 'to give them to God'?