*John 12:1-8 ~ April 6, 2025*

***Call to Worship:***

God says to us: I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers flow in the desert.

**The LORD does great things.**God says to us: Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. **The LORD does great things.**God says to us: I am about to do a new thing. **The LORD does great things.**

So we worship God with songs of joy and prayers of thanksgiving.

*Hymn: #*412 Come, let us sing to the Lord our song

***Prayer of Approach and Confession:***

Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life,

we come with grateful hearts,

We praise you for your creation and its reliable rhythms.

We praise you, for Christ and his ministry that we seek to continue.

By the power of your Spirit, lighten our hearts in this time of worship,

and help us brighten the lives we touch this week in Jesus’ name.

And so we praise you, O God,

Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life,

and offer you all glory and honour,

this day and every day, now and evermore.

Lord Jesus Christ,

we gather in your name today,

aware that you keep moving closer and closer to the cross.

We confess it is not easy to follow your story.

We confess we often struggle to decide what to give and whom to help.

We can be critical of those in need and those who help them.

Forgive us when we look for reasons not to share,

and excuse ourselves from acting generously,

as you did.

Lead us to learn from and follow the pattern of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen

***Assurance of Pardon*:**

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ –

And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. By Christ’s mercy, we can make a fresh start following him.

*Hymn:* #314 God is love: come heaven, adoring

***Anthem***

***Scripture Readings:*** *Psalm 126*

When the Lord restored the fortunes of[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20126&version=NIV#fen-NIV-16117a)] Zion,
    we were like those who dreamed.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20126&version=NIV#fen-NIV-16117b)]
**2**Our mouths were filled with laughter,
    our tongues with songs of joy.
Then it was said among the nations,
    “The Lord has done great things for them.”
**3**The Lord has done great things for us,
    and we are filled with joy.

**4**Restore our fortunes,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20126&version=NIV#fen-NIV-16120c)] Lord,
    like streams in the Negev.
**5**Those who sow with tears
    will reap with songs of joy.
**6**Those who go out weeping,
    carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
    carrying sheaves with them.

*John 12:1-8*

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2**Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. **3**Then Mary took about a pint[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2012%3A1-8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26584a)] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

**4**But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, **5**“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2012%3A1-8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26586b)]” **6**He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

**7**“Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. **8**You will always have the poor among you,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2012%3A1-8&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26589c)] but you will not always have me.”

***Meditation:*** *“The Vision”*

As I sat down to write this sermon two thoughts entered my mind, why did I pick such a tricky passage to preach on? And the second, who is really at the forefront of this passage? Every time I have read this passage there’s something about Mary that catches me.

Today we are read about Jesus going to Bethany, where he stopped in to see his old friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus before he entered the city for the last time.  He loved them, John tells us, although he does not tell us why.  Maybe there is no "why" to love.  They called him Lord, so they knew who Jesus was, and yet they were not his disciples, at least not in any formal sense.  They were his friends, the three people in whose presence he could be completely himself.

Now Jesus has come back to Bethany. When he arrives at his friends' house, they can see it on his face that he’s tired and worn out. So, they take him in and care for him, shutting the world out for this one night at least.  Finally, supper is on the table, and they all sit down to eat, saying what they hope and hiding what they fear.

No one notices that Mary has gone until she comes back holding a clay jar in her hands.  Wordless, she kneels at Jesus' feet and breaks the jar's neck.  The smell of perfumed oil fills the room—a sharp scent halfway between mint and ginseng.  Then, as everyone in the room watches her, does four remarkable things in a row.

First, she loosens her hair in a room full of men, which an honourable woman never does.   Then she pours perfume on Jesus' feet, which is also not done.  The head, maybe--people do that to kings--but not the feet.  Then she touches him--a single woman rubbing a single man's feet--also not done, not even among friends.  Then she wipes the perfume off with her hair--totally inexplicable--the bizarre end to an all-around bizarre act.

Most of us are so moved by the scene that we overlook the bizarreness of the situation. The point is that she loved him, right?  Right.  Unlike the other gospel lessons, only in John's version of the story does the woman have a name-Mary--and a relationship with Jesus--not a stranger, not a notorious sinner, but his long-time friend--which makes her act all the more peculiar.  He knows she loves him.  He loves her too.  So why this public demonstration in front of all their friends?  It's extravagant.  It's excessive.  She's gone overboard, as Judas is quick to note.

"Why wasn't this perfume sold for a whole lot of money and given to the poor?"  That's what Judas wants to know, but Jesus brushes him aside.

"Leave her alone," he says.  "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"--which is about as odd a thing for him to say as what Mary did.  Here is the champion of the poor, always putting their needs ahead of his, suddenly reversing course.  “Leave her alone.  Leave me alone.  Just this once, let her look after me, because my time is running out.”

Whatever Mary thought about what she did, and whatever anyone else in the room thought about it, Jesus took it as a message from God--not the hysteric actions of a maid gone sweetly mad but the carefully performed act of a prophet.  Everything around Mary smacked of significance--Judas, the betrayer, challenging her act; the flask of nard--wasn't it left over from Lazarus' funeral? --and out in the yard, a freshly vacated tomb that still smelled of burial spices, waiting for a new occupant.  While there may at first have been some doubt about whose death it was, Mary's prophetic act revealed the truth. She was anointing Jesus for his burial.

When Mary stood before Jesus with that pound of pure nard in her hand, it could have gone either way.  She could have anointed his head and everyone there could have proclaimed him a king.  But she did not do that.  When she moved toward him, she dropped to her knees instead and poured the perfume on his feet, which could only mean one thing.  The only man who got his feet anointed was a dead man, and Jesus knew it.  "Leave her alone," he said to those who would have prevented her.  “Let her finish delivering the message.*”*

So, Mary rubbed his feet with perfume so precious that its sale might have fed a poor family for a year, an act so lavish that it suggests another layer to her prophecy. This bottle will not be held back to be kept and admired.  This precious substance will not be saved.  It will be opened, offered and used, at great price.  It will be raised up and poured out for the life of the world, emptied to the last drop.  Before that happens, Jesus will gather his friends together one last time.  At another banquet, around another supper table, with most of the same people present, Jesus will strip, tie a towel around his waist, and wash his disciples' feet.  Then he will give them a new commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you.

At least one of the disciples will argue with him, while others will wonder if he has lost his mind.  But a few will watch him working on their feet and remember Mary bending over his feet like that--the prophet Mary--who knew how to respond to Jesus without being told, the one who acted out his last, new commandment before he ever said it.  Remembering her may help them leave himalone while he finishes delivering hismessage.

At home in Bethany, the storm clouds are still piling up against the door when Mary gives the forecast: it will be bad, very bad, but that's no reason for Jesus' friends to lock their hearts and head to the cellar.  Whatever they need, there will be enough to go around.  There is no reason to fear running out--of nard or of life either one--for where God is concerned, there is always more than we can ask or imagine--gifts from our Lord are always abundant. Amen.

*Hymn: #*746 What a friend we have in Jesus

***Invitation of Offering:***

At the dinner party for Jesus in Bethany, Mary anointed Christ with expensive perfume, pouring out her love and devotion. Jesus accepted Mary’s gift gladly and graciously. Trust that Christ will never reject our gifts, offered with love and devotion, so let us present our offering with glad and generous hearts.

***Doxology:*** *#830 Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

***Prayer of Dedication:***

Gracious God, even as Mary poured out her love for Jesus,

he was preparing to pour out his life on the cross for her and for us all.

We are grateful for such love, given and received, then given again.

Accept the gifts we bring and anoint them with your Spirit

so that they will flow into the world, refreshing others with your mercy and love.

***Prayers of the People and Lord’s Prayer:***

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,

We come to you in prayer,

trusting that you are with us in the ups and downs,

the joys and sorrows of these challenging days.

We give you thanks for every sign of your presence with us,

for every unexpected kindness,

every word of comfort or encouragement,

every sign of courage in the face of injustice,

every hopeful step towards reconciliation amid conflict,

and healing in the face of disease or danger.

Thank you for your presence with us in all things.

In this unpredictable world, we pray for those whose lives are caught up in reckless terror or planned oppression, and for those living in places where they are afraid to walk freely; we remember all who find the uncertainty of our times overwhelming and discouraging. May those living in fear courage to go on in your company.

As the stories of Jesus turn us toward the cross, O God,

we pray for those who also walk the road of suffering.

We remember before you

those whose lives have been plunged into sorrow or despair

through tragic death,

through critical illness or chronic pain.

and through complicated problems that seem to have no end.

May all these know your comfort and compassion.

O God, the stories of Jesus show us

that he faced the clamour of many demands

and the pressure of many critics.

We pray for all those who are exhausted these days,

juggling more demands and fewer resources in their work or at home,

for those who cannot seem to get it right, whatever they do,

and for all those facing unfair criticism and expectations

in the responsibilities they bear on behalf of others.

May all these be strengthened by your Spirit of justice and mercy.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.

Anoint us with your Spirit of healing and hope,

and bring peace to our lives and this world you love

for the sake of Christ Jesus who taught us to pray together:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

*Hymn: #*205 O love, how deep, how broad, how high

***Benediction:***

Go in peace; be of good courage, hold fast to what is good, render no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honour all people, love and serve God

Now may the LORD keep us and bless us,

May the LORD make his face to shine upon us

and be gracious unto us,

Now and for ever more, AMEN.

***Choral Closing: “Go Now in Peace”***

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know He will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.