

“Let”
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
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Mark 11:1-11; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1 – 15:74

The story starts with a warm welcome. Jesus rode into Jerusalem in style on a borrowed colt that had never been ridden. People laid branches and even their own clothes on the ground to honor his presence. It was a provocative way to enter the city, done in a manner usually reserved for kings and conquering commanders. The religious elite who opposed Jesus were probably apoplectic with rage, and the Romans no doubt viewed this with suspicion, a possible threat to their dominance. Yet the crowds responded to Jesus with unbridled praise. He embodied the fulfillment of their hopes. A descendent of David had come to set them free.

Jesus didn’t stay long. He took a look around the Temple and left for Bethany, a few miles outside city. While there, he received hospitality from Simon’s family, and during dinner a woman crashed the party, shattered a bottle of very expensive ointment, and poured it over Jesus’ head. That was a radical act of generosity, offered with such enthusiasm that she didn’t bother uncorking the jar, but broke it so that the nard could flow freely.

The disciples complained, and we can sympathize with that. It was an extravagant gesture from someone uninvited, and that nard was worth roughly a year’s wages. How ridiculous for her to waste it on Jesus. It could have been used to better purpose. Sold at market, that ointment could have fetched plenty to feed the poor, a noble thought, but Jesus defended her.

Somehow, probably not in a conscious way, she had anticipated the sacrifice Jesus would soon make, and preemptively anointed him for burial, an act of kindness so powerful that Jesus declared, “wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be

told in remembrance of her,” which nearly 2,000 years later proves to be true, even though we don’t know her name.

A few days later, Jesus and his disciples returned to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, the annual ritual meal that celebrated how God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Now this was supposed to be a joyous experience, but Jesus ruined it. As they began to eat, he revealed that one of the twelve would betray him. After dinner, he said that the other eleven would desert him at the crucial moment.

Within a few hours, all of Jesus’ closest disciples would abandon and deny him to save their own skins. Their faith was conquered by fear. Their love of Jesus was overwhelmed by their love of self and safety. One was so desperate that he ran off naked. We cannot judge them, because we do the same, each in our own way, over and over again. It’s called sin. But like those twelve, Jesus still invites us to share in him, to partake of his body so that we might be united in him and with one another.

Despite it all, Jesus took the bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it and said, “Take; this is my body.” These words foretold and will forever symbolize how Jesus’ body would be taken by force, broken by the cross, given for the sake of the world’s salvation.

In his death, Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,” to quote Paul. “He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” By pouring out his life for us, Jesus made room for us to dwell in him, the most profound act of hospitality possible, the greatest blessing anyone could give or receive. How generous, yet so undeserved and unrepayable. But we can respond to his sacrifice, much in the same way the woman with the jar of nard did.

As Paul urges, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Be courageous, a word that literally means “take heart.” It took courage for that woman to burst in where she wasn’t wanted and break the jar and pour the nard on Jesus’ head and accept the scandal and shaming. It took courage for Jesus to do what he did, too, which may come as a surprise to some. We know how the story ends, with an empty tomb and a resurrected Christ. We also know that Jesus knew what would happen, too. So we think his suffering, while horrible, was something he expected and accepted and was ready to endure, somewhat similar to how we brace ourselves for an unpleasant medical procedure, but the Gospel tells us otherwise.

Jesus was upset and scared. He was human, just as we are. On the Mount of Olives, “He threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” On the cross, he cried out with the words of Psalm 22, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These are not the words of someone who causally goes to his death undisturbed by the agony to come.

We sometimes mistakenly think that Jesus’ death was his destiny, but he chose to let go and surrender his life in obedience to God so that God’s purpose – the forgiveness and reconciliation of sinners – might be fulfilled. Jesus overcame fear by faith. He relented, relinquished control, not because fate demanded it, but because he loved God and he loves us more than he loves himself.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Take heart and take risks for the glory of God and for the sake of others. Pray for wisdom and the strength to endure. Disregard the cost and don’t be embarrassed if others are offended or scandalized by your radical generosity. Break the jar of your heart open, and pour it out on Jesus. Better yet, invite Jesus to

break your heart, for once your heart is empty, there's room to welcome him more fully and offer hospitality to the only one who can fill our hearts with joy. Let God take charge of your life, because only then can any of us truly live. Make the sacrifice of surrender. "Not what I want, but what you want." Serve Jesus like a slave, because obedience to him is the only thing that can make us truly free. Give up and receive the gift of grace.

Now this is Commitment Weekend for our capital campaign, the time when we ask everyone to make a sacrificial offering to God that will advance His mission for St. Luke's. So it would be easy to presume that everything I've said points toward fundraising, and it does. But there's more to it than that.

Jesus doesn't want part of who are. He gave it all. He wants it all: our time, our creativity, our labor, every choice, each thought and word and deed – all consecrated to God's glory and the fulfillment of His purposes. And there's only one way that will work. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," and that hinges on a single word, a word of surrender, of capitulation: "Let." Amen.