**Mary, Martha, Lazarus, Jesus, & Judas**

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**April 6th, 2025**

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**John 12:1-8**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Let me set the stage here before we really dive into things. First off, we have two sisters, Mary and Martha. We also have their brother, Lazarus. They all are present with Jesus, and they are about to have a meal together. However, these are not the only folks in our story, as we also have Judas lurking in the background. With that being said, I am all but certain there are several other folks there who we just do not hear about as well.

Not to mention, I am not too sure how hungry Lazarus truly was. For if you happen to be following things in the book of John then you realize that the story we heard today directly follows him being woken up and called out of the tomb. Not to mention, a tomb that he was not just in for a few moments or hours, but one that he was actually dead in for a total of four days. Now, I would venture to guess that he was starving, and this might be the first major meal he was having since he had been woken up from his temporary four-day slumber. It is also yet again another story in the Bible where the meal and being together is one of our central focuses.

To bring things into further context then we would probably gather that this meal was being thrown by the sisters as a thank offering. If you notice both of these ladies in the story were particularly busy. At all points they were trying to get life back to normal, and they were trying to remove from memory the most recent experience they had. For as you can imagine, the smell of death was still probably very present. Lazarus came out of the tomb following four days of burial with all of his wraps still on. Yes, Jesus was able to bring him back to life, but there is no way the sight and odor of death just magically disappeared from memory. Of course, we know the wraps were removed, and without a doubt he was able to take a bath by that point. However, some things, some experiences, some odors just do not go away quickly. There is of course some very good foreshadowing here as well, for the scent of death would be coming around the corner yet again at the cross, and another tomb would be opened, and Christ would be the one conquering death once and for all.

Alright, let me not get to far ahead of things here. So, what do these ladies do to make this event different, or better for that fact? Martha of course jumps in the kitchen and commits her acts of service to preparing a meal. She is not avoiding the teacher or her other guests, but she is doing what she knows how to do. She is committing to the needs of her family and guests. Martha is doing what Jesus has talked about and shown throughout His entire earthly ministry, that of committing to a life of service to one another. Martha is making the house smell wonderful with all the various foods and things she is preparing, almost as if she is flooding the senses and pushing out that familiar stench of death that they all recently experienced. Then, we hear about Mary. She steps up and chooses to anoint Jesus’ feet with perfume, and she holds nothing back as she uses the entire jar of perfume. She is not trying to outdo her sister in the kitchen, but she indeed has created yet another amazing scent in the house to cover that recent stench of death. She has even used so much oil that in anointing Jesus’ feet she has indeed anointed herself, as she has to utilize her hair to wipe up the remainder of the perfume. Mary is being a blessing, and receiving a blessing at the very same time. Mary is even foreshadowing to the very event that is to occur in just a few short days, where Jesus would be the one washing the feet of His disciples. A little different, but yet a very similar act.

Other than the ladies, we of course get that stinking Judas complaining over in the corner. He is continuing to slip away and lose all focus. All he cares about is the money that this perfume would have generated had it been sold. Now, of course he says that the money should have been spent on the poor, but we all know the story and the character that he is. We all know that this man was looking to line his pockets, and go out and get himself a new tunic or a new pair of sandals. He is the only person in the room that cares for one person… and that person being himself. What a shame, but yet what a reality. Oh yeah, we also have Lazarus. How could I have forgotten? Well, I guess it is because he is just “reclining,” as the scripture puts it. As a reminder, this guy was just dead folks, and now he has been raised back to life by his good ole friend Jesus. I am sure there are other reasons that he is not very busy in this story, but the fact that he was present still means a lot, and it shows his love and appreciation.

All of this is going on in our story, all of these characters are at work before Jesus decides to step in with his words in verses 7 and 8. If you do not remember them then let me repeat those very verses back to you. “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.”” (2) There is so much meaning wrapped up in just a few statements. We truly need to break this down even more to really grasp the entire story for sure.

However, let’s be honest here. How many of you are sitting out there and thinking… How in the heck did Mary get all of that money to even be able to purchase that very expensive bottle of perfume?!?! Back then that was a typical year’s wage! As a matter of fact, it probably was way more money than that considering she was not a male in society. Let alone she would not be working the common hours since it was also expected of her to take care of the home and several other duties. Then again, if she was working, she for sure was not making the kind of money that a male would be making in society back then. So, with all that in mind… How in the heck did Mary get the money to afford that? Well, some things just do not get answered whether we ponder them or not. Some fine details are just not needed to be honest.

Alright, back to verses 7 and 8, let’s focus here! First off, Jesus comes to Mary’s defense. He tells Judas to back off! He tells Judas and all those in the house awaiting the meal that Mary has done right. Jesus tells everyone that she is preparing Him for His very burial. Well, that probably just made things rather uncomfortable. However, Jesus has been telling them for some time now that His death would be occurring. Was this the moment that it really sank in for some reason? So, we do indeed get Mary preparing Jesus for what is to come, and she is doing it while He is living instead of dead. She wants Jesus to know how much she appreciates and loves him. So, Jesus’ words are perfect. Judas back off! For there is nothing wrong with her loving and appreciating me while I am alive and present with you all.

One thing I also want to be rather clear about here is that Jesus is not saying to forget about the poor. He is actually saying to pull the poor in tighter. He is calling for them to experience the very same love they have shown Jesus. He is indeed saying that the poor are always with and among us, but that they should be cared for precisely like this, and not like they are less than. They are people too, just like you and I. We are to show them the very same unconditional love that the family has shown in this very story in our Gospel Reading today. We are to hang out with them, just like Lazarus did. We are to serve and feed them, just as Martha did. We are to bless and anoint them, just as Mary did.

Yes, that is precisely our call folks! We are to share everything that is ours, for nothing would even be ours without our Triune God. Yes, Jesus said that they would not always have Him with them, but the closest thing they would have would be their brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are to love on them just like Jesus.

As we wrap things up here let me remind you that the triumphant entry, the palm branches and cloaks being thrown down on the road, the betrayal in the garden, the trial, the mocking, the denial, the beating, the journey carrying the cross, and the death are yet to come in our story as we continue marching on in these forty days of Lent. However, even though we know the stories, even though we have heard the scripture, and even though we have attended the services time and time again, let us not rush. Let us continue to live on in this season of repentance and preparation. Let us continue to ready our minds and our hearts as we approach that most triumphant moment that we all desire to experience yet again on Easter Sunday!

There is a reason we explore things time and time again. There is a reason that we explore different accounts of several of the same stories. That is the blessing of being together and getting into scripture. There are so many hidden gems in just a few verses, and there are so many different takes on things. This is the very excitement and struggle I deal with each and every week as I study and prepare a sermon. However, I am so thankful for it. I am so thankful for all of you. For I do not have to rejoice alone on Easter, but I will get to celebrate with all of you! However, we have to do the uncomfortable. We have to travel the road with Jesus. We cannot just jump right to Easter Sunday in all of its glory and majesty. These events and these things happened, and we need to explore them together. So please continue to join me and slow your hearts and minds down and continue to focus on this time we have together with one another in this season of Lent.

**Amen.**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

Preaching

Year C 2025

April 6th, 2025

Fifth Sunday in Lent

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

Revised and Updated

A Guide to Biblical Preaching

Paul Scott Wilson

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(4) WorkingPreacher.org

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Surrounded by movements toward death, we find this celebration of the life Jesus

has given

April 6, 2025

Commentary on John 12:1-8

Brian Peterson

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

Fifth Sunday in Lent

The poor you always have with you.

April 7, 2019

Commentary on John 12:1-8

Lindsey S. Jodrey

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Even the pleasant-smelling oils would remind the senses that death was in the air

April 3, 2022

Commentary on John 12:1-8

Emerson Powery

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Fifth Sunday in Lent

Sometimes we tell a simple story of discipleship: believers are “in” and unbelievers

are “out.”

March 17, 2013

Commentary on John 12:1-8

Susan Hylen

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Extravagance. Pleasure. Effusiveness. Exuberance. These aren’t ideas that we

usually associate with Lent and the overture to Jesus’ passion.

March 21, 2010

Commentary on John 12:1-8

Matt Skinner

(9) Luthermatrix

The blog of a lutheran pastor, writer, and political animal.

Thursday, April 03, 2025

Sermon: The Ache

**John 12:1-****8**

Judas willfully misinterprets as waste Mary’s extravagant act of anointing Jesus’ feet with costly perfume. Jesus recognizes that her lavish gift is both an expression of love and an anticipation of his burial.

1 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’s feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6 (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.) 7 Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”