

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 3rd April 2022
Lent 5 - Passion Sunday

The house was filled with the fragrance of perfume.

The initial joy of today's Gospel reading is its sense of peace. We have had Jesus travelling around, preaching and teaching; arguing with the teachers and leaders of the community; the pace has been relentless. Now we stop.

Jesus comes into a comfortable, ordinary home setting and we get a sense of domestic peace. Martha is beavering away in the kitchen preparing the meal, feeding her family and friends. Mary, as usual, has chosen to sit at the feet of Jesus. The disciples are gathered around.

Yet, this time Mary doesn't just sit. She begins to minister to Jesus in a very personal and meaningful way. Taking some very expensive perfume she anoints him. It is Jesus normally who offers the healing touch. Now it is Mary. She soothes his skin with healing, cooling oil. It fills the house with a beautiful fragrance; everyone benefits from her actions. Martha doesn't complain. The disciples sit back and relax. Only Judas is recorded as objecting.

The writer of John's Gospel says Judas complains because he wants to steal the money. I'm never completely convinced of these derogatory asides. John clearly didn't like this character and paints him in the darkest hues, not helped I guess by the fact that Judas becomes the betrayer. What we do get from Judas is a reflection of that groups following Jesus who clearly didn't understand who or what Jesus was. They may have followed him around the country and Jerusalem but they have done so for various reasons – political, economic, personal – even Peter shows us a lack of understanding in Jesus' earthly ministry. It is not until Easter morning that the penny begins to drop...but that's for another time.

Here in this passage we have two people reflecting two approaches to Jesus. Mary who had sat and listened to Jesus and understood who he was, what he was talking about and crucially where this was all leading. She may not have foreseen the cross but she was pointing to his death.

Judas on the other hand clearly had not understood anything of Jesus' ministry, probably filtering what he heard and saw through his own prejudice and priorities.

As always, when we look to the followers of Jesus we see reflected in them our own faith journey and why we are here. We do have an advantage over these followers in that we know how this story ends.

I wonder then how the story of Jesus affects your life, the way you share or play your part in the community at large; how you live your faith and how it appears to others.

We can identify with aspects of the disciples' stories in ourselves. Some of us as Marthas – doers whose understanding of faith is through service. Some are Marys who sit at the feet of Jesus contemplating the presence of God whose company we constantly seek. Some will be Peters, doubting, questioning, getting it wrong but passionate about the gospel and following the way of Jesus with deep love and determination. And yes, some will be Judas' whose expectations of Jesus are understood through a personal filter of our own expectations and desires.

There is that one thing that draws us all together – Jesus Christ himself. He is our common denominator for no matter which follower we feel most akin to, it is he that we follow. It is him who we agree points us to God our Father and we agree it is through Jesus we know the Holy Spirit as our advocate before God and our guide to God.

Today we hold our Annual Parish Church Meeting. This is us, sitting together, in stillness and peace, to hear how Jesus' ministry is continued at St Peters. It is important. It may not always scratch where it itches, but it does give us an overview of life, mission and ministry here amongst us. What we are doing to build up the life of faith in our community. Knowing the state of our accounts and our building is as much part of that as is our knowing about Ivy Café and Amnesty Letter Writing, Safeguarding or Food Bank.

Our APCM also points to where we must go. How we should be developing the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in this parish. As we seek to develop this ministry and mission, like the disciples we need to grapple with our understanding of Jesus Christ as who we proclaim. We are these disciples sitting around enjoying this domestic peace with Jesus. Yet we have to be those disciples who take the Easter message of the love of God for the whole of creation, revealed in the resurrected Christ who brings healing and wholeness into the world.

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