

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior; Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Lenten Season approaches a close and our gospel text speaks of the day when Jesus will be buried. The end is near for the time of Christ with us as a human teacher, guide, healer, mentor, friend, and comfort. The ministry and mission of our Lord are nearing completion and we again prepare our hearts and minds for the days and the texts to come.

We ‘prepare’ in remembrance of what our Good God has truly done for us, in love, so that we might have an eternal relationship with our Creator, King, and Companion.

Today’s gospel text is the symbolic ‘anointing’ of the body with oil as was the custom with burials. However, Jesus is not dead yet; He is in fact very much alive and continues to teach, share, and direct our thought, both in the text and today. The gospel is indeed alive and speaking to us if we look and listen to the truth. No word is out of place or incorrect; in fact, it is perfectly stated so all people might believe.

Notice the very first sentence of this passage; Jesus is gathered with someone who was once dead! Lazarus is alive, well, and about to have an evening meal in the presence of His Lord! Jesus was seen by Peter, James, and John with Moses and Elijah, who also previously were dead and are now seen with Jesus and they are alive. And now for the final time, Jesus is seen again with one who was once dead and continues to reflect His relationship, care, and compassion for LIFE.

This is a unique passage as this event is recorded in all four gospel texts (with some variations between gospels as to the people who are identified). Today, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are identified and we know from the location, these three are brother and sisters. Jesus has met with them all before and today they gather for a final meal together. Present company includes, at the least, Judas – the disciple of Jesus who will betray Him for MONEY. Now Jesus knows the heart and mind of Judas and He knows Judas’s dishonest nature and behavior.

It is not a coincidence that Judas is at this very event. In fact, this display of compassion for Jesus with expensive perfume takes Judas so completely by storm that he lashed out against the Lord with a complaint that the poor people deserved the value of the perfume more than Jesus did. Now you have to admit, this is clearly bold and brazen to openly declare what you think the Lord God is worth and to say the money was better given to the poor.

Make no mistake my friends; Judas reveals his nature to us as well through his words and actions. So what is the value of the perfume that Mary anointed the Lord with. Jesus’s own disciple is outraged with the amount, so why not do the calculation in today’s currency? We know a denarius is the equivalent of a day’s wages. We know the perfume cost 300 denarii. Today, a day’s wages can be calculated as minimum wage times 8 hours; Federal minimum wage is \$7.25 making a day’s wage \$58; multiplied by 300 is \$17,400.

Why is Judas outraged? Before you answer that, consider a long time ago when Moses and Pharaoh were in negotiations regarding the release of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. Pharaoh was enraged with God’s display of power and might through Moses and the 10 plagues that ensued. Pharaoh was a mighty king; the most powerful in the land and a Hebrew leader shows greater strength and power to where it is recorded that ‘Pharaoh’s heart was hardened’.

Judas is stealing money while being a disciple of Christ; this is a fact identified in the gospel text. Yet what happens in the text today with Judas is very similar to Pharaoh in that God has allowed Judas to witness an unbelievable event. This time it is not power that is leveraged, it is MONEY, the very weakness of Judas. For someone who is dishonest and stealing...to see \$17,400 poured out for any reason that does not benefit them is certainly going to ‘harden their heart’.

Is there ‘the rest of the story’ here my friends? If there is, it might very well be an understanding of human weakness that explains what pushed Judas over the edge to betray Jesus for what? MONEY! What Judas receives to betray Jesus is best estimated between \$58 and a few thousand dollars. Regardless of which end of the scale we select, the 30 pieces of silver were significantly less than the cost of the perfume.

So what is new and living for us in the gospel text today that we may have over looked in times before? Judas looked at the ‘cost’ of the perfume where others considered its ‘value’. Cost and value are very different in definition and in application. Jesus even makes this point to Judas directly when He states, “you will always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

Jesus is not talking about the poor in a monetary context because Jesus looks at our worth and our value. Jesus speaks of those who are poor in spirit, those who are hungry and those who weep only from the point of what they are able to receive through faithful living. This is the text that opened our Lenten season this year and the warning (and prophecy) to Judas that brings us to Palm Sunday when we read the words proclaim, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

But Judas, like the Pharisees, will not turn back nor turn from his focus on money, which will come at a cost and price to him. Judas will indeed lose his Lord and his life as a result of greed and guilt associated with the cost of his actions instead of the value of his faith and trust.

Jesus offers us wealth in abundance, not in the form of money, but in the form of abundance life, peace, comfort, security, protection, and care; abundant life that provides for our every need. Judas will not experience the wealth that God offers, but will indeed always have the poor with him always as he will not turn from his ways, repent and be changed. Judas will indeed have the poor with him as he will be poor in spirit, poor in faith, poor in trust, and soon without the Lord at his side... not because Jesus is leaving Judas, but because Judas leaves the Lord.

I continue to share with you there is no speculation in Holy Scripture and there are no coincidences. And still when we read the Word and ask God to help us see the wisdom and understand the meanings; we cannot help but contemplate how someone could so close to Jesus, a very disciple to witness the miracles of the Lord, could not be changed. We must remember in all things that God’s Word must stand and prophecy will be fulfilled. Zachariah prophesies Jesus’s betrayal in details including the exact number of silver coins according to the Jewish Law.

And now, for the rest of the story: After Judas was overcome with guilt for betraying Jesus; he attempted to return the 30 pieces of silver to the temple treasury. The priests would not accept blood money as to contaminate the treasury. However, they did accept the money and purchased land to bury strangers. The name of the land is called Potter’s field. My friends, Jeremiah states that “God is the Potter and we are the clay”. So you see, even when society casts us out, and places us in Potter’s Field we are still in the tender care of our Loving Father, who provides the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.