



News Letter

6 April 2020

Our Church on-line

Naracoorte Uniting Church web site: <https://www.naracoorteuca.org.au/>

Thanks again to Oriel, Bill and Wayne who worked to produce the Palm Sunday podcast.

Two services this week – Good Friday and Easter day.

Prayers of the people

Please get prayer requests to me by **Thursday** so I can include them in the service.

- In particular we have been asked to pray for communities across the world who are confronting this pandemic from situations of extreme distress – poverty, war, oppression or inadequate medical services.
- We pray for those in our own church community who are ill at this time – John Kester and Sue Kuchel.

Mid-week reading

This week I have taken a passage of scripture, one of the Lectionary readings for Monday in Holy week:

John 12:1-11

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' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about half a litre 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.' 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, but you will not always have me.'

⁹ Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, ¹¹ for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

When you read the gospels – the stories of Jesus’ life, what he said and what he did, and what was done and said to him – you don’t get a lot of abstract theology. Certainly, you get some commands from Jesus about loving your enemies, forgiving others, living in a way that honours God and that loves and respects others. We learn that it is the Father’s wish that his will is done on earth as in heaven. And we learn, especially from John’s gospel of the close identity and the mutual love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

But mostly, in the gospels what you see is **action**. You see faith, and sometimes unfaith, in action.

Mary’s confession of faith was an unspoken action of adoration and love, and indeed commitment.

What motivated Mary to do what she did in pouring this expensive perfume, worth we are told, 300 denarii, or 300 silver coins, or in fact a year’s wages for a labourer? Judas Iscariot wasn’t impressed! Why wasn’t this perfume sold and given to the poor? Mark’s gospel and Matthew’s gospel tell us that others there had the same thought – what an extravagant waste!

Mary obviously had been saving this precious perfume for something special. Maybe it was a family heirloom, maybe the family was quite rich – we don’t know, but what we do know is that Jesus had restored Mary’s brother to life again after he had been dead for four days and so changed Mary’s inconsolable grief to joy.

Mary knew, as Martha knew, that Jesus was the Messiah – (as Martha previously declares), the Son of God, the one who the scriptures had promised would come into the world, truly the resurrection and the life. Mary had seen that this was literally true, and to Mary, Jesus was worth far, far, more than 300 denarii. This, the Son of God, was priceless.

And she wished to honour him. What occasion, what person, what Son of God could possibly be more appropriate to pour this precious perfume upon – and not just a bit, the whole lot. Mark’s gospel tells us that she broke the alabaster flask open and poured it out. She didn’t say anything. She just did it.

In a week’s time Jesus would be dead, hanging on a Roman cross. He knew that this is going to happen, in fact he chooses the time of Passover for this action of atonement, and so he says to the people there in the room – “Leave Mary alone”. Mark’s gospel reports him saying “she has done a beautiful thing to me.”

“Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

Jesus sees in her action the prediction of his near death and burial and he says quite truly that you will always have the opportunity and indeed the obligation to help the poor, but there will ever be only one opportunity, just now, for Mary to do this – and Mary has taken it.

It’s an action of honour, worship and commitment.

In a week’s time, Jesus too, takes an action of obedience to the Father and commitment to his will. Jesus doesn’t spend a lot of words to give us a theological understanding of what is happening through the events of Easter – it’s an action, an unprecedented once for all time action, through which God himself is dying under the weight of all the evil in the world and

rising to new life in resurrection, heals the world he created, and offers us forgiveness and new life.

Our response to this can only be an **action**. We can spend a lot of time theorising about it, and this is not necessarily a bad thing, but Jesus asks us for a commitment. Place your faith in him. Just do it. Take the opportunity presented. Do something extravagant and reckless. Something you do once and for all if you truly do it at all - break open the bottle.

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