



Lent reflection for Monday, April 3rd

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Matthew 26:7-13

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, 'Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.' But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

Today's reflection is by Kallen Tsikalas

During the month of March, I had the pleasure of co-teaching a Sunday school unit about giving and community. When the Mothers suggested a set of four scriptures as the backbone of our study, I specifically asked if we might replace the story of the magi bearing gifts with the story of Mary, sister of Lazarus, pouring out expensive nard on Jesus' feet and wiping it off with her hair (John 12:1-8).

I love this story: The house filled with a fragrance of perfume, the astonishment of Jesus's disciples beholding the spilled oil, the full-bodied fervor of the maiden wiping her master's feet with unbound hair, the crazy extravagance in this gesture of love.

Today's reading is similar, but it took me to an entirely different place, one I didn't quite expect. Here, we find ourselves in the home of Simon the leper, where an unnamed woman steps into the room and pours an expensive ointment over Jesus's head. She is admonished by the disciples but praised by Jesus. She has prepared him for burial.

In reading this passage over and over again, I have been troubled by the image of preparing Jesus for burial while he is still alive. Somehow this seems wrong.

Maybe it's just too close to home.

As I witness and struggle with my mother's decline and uneasy placement in a memory care facility, as I notice the changes the years are bringing to my own physical body, as I find myself aging in a culture that prizes youth, I sometimes feel that I too am incrementally preparing for burial. This is a dark and sorrowful space. To be conceding to death—it seems wrong.

Here though, Jesus knows he is soon to die. He, too, must be in a dark and sorrowful space. Yet, he was pleased by the actions of this woman: *By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.*

What does Jesus's response mean for us?

Perhaps in being seen and appreciated as we really are—struggling with senescence or maybe dying in other, smaller ways—we can be sanctified. If we accept these oils, we can be made holy and reminded that God is with us, God is in us, and God gives us life both within and beyond this current reality. Truly, this is good news.

Kallen Tsikalas and her family (Scott, Halcy, and Lulu the dog) have been attending Holy Apostles for about 8 years. She loves trees and rocks and fungi and babbling brooks, and wandering by foot and mind. She is a social insights researcher.

