

## Philippians 3:7-14

<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in<sup>[a]</sup> Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

## John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Then Mary took about a pint<sup>[a]</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.<sup>[b]</sup>" <sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You will always have the poor among you,<sup>[c]</sup> but you will not always have me."

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, <sup>11</sup> for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.

In our gospel readings we have various characters.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

Judas Iscariot.

The chief priests feature in the story.

And you and I are characters in this story as well.

Apart from Jesus, none of the characters had an idea of what was approaching although we know the events of the first Easter were going to take place. There was though an atmosphere. A growing threat. A cloud was hanging over things.

**Martha.** Her way of showing love was to serve, was to do things. Unlike the other occasion when she was cross with Mary for not helping, here there is no trace of that.

Her love for Jesus was a practical, efficient service laying on a meal for Jesus and the whole entourage. I think the family must have been quite well to do.

**Lazarus.** He never actually says anything. He's like Joseph in the Christmas story. Lazarus is an item in the story but we get little sense of his character, all we know is that he died and Jesus raised him from death. He was a follower of Jesus, I imagine he loved Jesus as the other disciples did, but we don't really know. We also discovered that his celebrity status is marking him out for death, along with Jesus.

**Mary.** She is very different to her sister. Her way of showing love is to take this expensive and pure ointment

and anoint Jesus' feet. She wipes his feet with her hair, which was shocking, married woman always had their hair up...so maybe she wasn't married. Anyway, it was still intimate and special.

What motivated her? What intuition, what reason? She gave something costly, did something beautiful and as we read, the perfume filled the whole house. Love does that. An act of love can fill a place.

**Judas.** Into the story we have the unfortunate Judas who we know went on to betray Jesus and here John tells us he was indignant about the gift and largely because he was a thief. Trusted with the money bag for the company he helped himself.

Into this lovely scene of intimacy and beauty with perfume filling the air, we have the ugliness of Judas complaint.

**Many people** had come to see what was occurring, because Jesus was there and to see Lazarus, he's a bit more than a one-minute wonder. Many knew he had died. They had seen him buried and it was for four days. Here he was alive and kicking.

**The Chief Priests.** They feature briefly, angered by it all and incensed people are following Jesus because of Lazarus. So they plan to kill Jesus and Lazarus as a way of putting a stop to all that.

It's a 'before easter' story. It's a story of love and hatred and beauty and ugliness. It shows different responses to Jesus and great contrast in the people named.

The love we show to Jesus might be in very different ways. You might be more of a Martha, serving others is your love language. You might be more like Mary, with the courage to allow an intimate love.

Our author, John, called himself the beloved disciple and knew himself to be loved. He leant against Jesus at the last supper. John would remember Mary's loving gesture; he would have approved.

And you might well know people who have no time for faith and think it's all a waste of time and money. Let's not label them Judas but recognise that the acts of love and faith make no sense to them.

Let's just touch on the other reading. St. Paul.

His spiritual journey took him from being a religious zealot to apostle to the Gentiles. From hating Jesus to being a devoted servant spreading the gospel.

He had a big reputation and yet he was able to say,

"All that? It's garbage. There's only one thing worth living for, worth striving for. Forget all the past, leave everything behind. Push on, seek the goal, win the prize, complete the race. There's only one thing and it's not a thing. It's a person. I want to know Christ, be at one with him and his suffering, death and resurrection.

St. Paul would encourage us to keep on strongly in our faith seeking Christ and being found in him. Martha would encourage us to serve him, Mary would encourage us to love him.

And you? You are in this story. May you find the deepest joy in loving and serving Christ this Easter, giving him your devotion and worship. Allowing yourself to love and never mind whose watching.

**Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 6 April 2025**