

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 7th April 2019 10am

Revd Val Reid

John 12: 1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

Sermon

He had nowhere to lay his head.

He often said that.

Reminded us that his was a lonely calling.

Always on the road.

Always moving on.

Always taking the risk of speaking.

Or not speaking.

Always making new friends.

And then leaving them behind.

Always making new enemies too.

So it seemed important to give him a home.

Just for an evening.

One day.

I could see it wouldn't be for long.

They had him in their sights.

He was too subversive.

The people were too volatile.

Too many of the powerful had too much to lose.

So we gave a dinner for him.

A dinner at home.

The home where we had so often sat and talked.

In those precious gaps between the long months on the road.

The home where my sister had so often cooked.

And I had so often sat and listened.
We'd come to a sort of understanding, now.
She loved cooking.
She poured her love into food.
Food for the body.
And food for the heart.
For a wandering preacher, home cooking was soul food.
But I loved sitting at his feet.
Listening.
Thinking.
Pondering.
There was a time when she was irritated – furious – because I wouldn't help in the kitchen.
And I was exasperated that she was wasting this time – this precious time – with housework.
We won't have him for long.
Make the most of it, Martha.
Pay attention.
This moment won't last for ever.
But now – now she served.
And I – well I was suddenly overwhelmed with grief.
Listening no longer seemed enough, somehow.

So – a dinner.
For him.
And for the disciples.
And us.
His family.
I liked to think of us as his family.
Because Lazarus was home again.
Martha was delighted.
Our brother back with us.
Back from the stench of the grave.
Why not celebrate?
Why not have a party?

But our brother was quiet.
He wasn't speaking.
He was there, all right – but not there.
He had seen – what?
Been – where?
And how could it feel to be back in this room, Martha cooking, our friends chatting and laughing – after that journey into darkness?
It felt all wrong, somehow.
Like a denial.
A denial of truth.

Because the truth was that they were out to get him.
And Lazarus too.
It wasn't safe for Jesus to preach.
Or to go about openly.
And Lazarus?
He was a symbol of everything they feared about the rabbi.
His power.
His popularity.
His subversiveness.
So I didn't know how long we would have him back with us.
From death to life to death again.
I know this to be true.
In the midst of life we are in death.

All over the country people were preparing for Passover.
Lambs were being slaughtered.
We were about to remember the cost of freedom.
Or supposed to remember.

I don't know where the idea came from.
But it felt important that I should do something.
So that he knew he was not alone.
That there was at least one other person who wasn't pretending that everything was all right.
Who wasn't shutting her eyes to the truth.
The painful truth.
How many times had he opened the eyes of the blind?
And they still didn't get it!

I shall never forget the moment when I anointed his feet.
Wiped them with my hair.
I didn't say a word.
I didn't need to.
I could see in his eyes that he knew what I was saying.
Saying without language.

I was surrounded by argument.
Men in love with the sound of their own voices.
Arguing about the cost of the perfume.
What was it worth?
How many poor people could have been fed?
The sound – the familiar sound – of men talking finance.
But what we do – that never figures in the economics.
There is no price on preparing a meal for those you love.
Providing a home for a weary traveller.

Looking into the eyes of someone facing death and saying - yes.

I know.

There is nothing I can do to change this.

But I will be with you.

To the end.

And I could see that it wasn't lost on him.

The last supper.

The table of friends.

The foot-washing.

He understood its significance.

I could see him storing it up in his imagination.

To be used.

To be transformed.

Like water into wine.

As I stored it up in mine.

Because this is what will matter.

When death comes.

As it will.

Looking into his face.

Knowing the truth.

We are not alone.

What will remain of us is love.

Amen.