

# Christ and Mary

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Just before we begin, Donald, can I thank you and thank Emma and thank the session and thank the congregation for your warm and welcoming welcome over these days.
- It's always lovely to be here and always, as I said yesterday, it's close to our hearts. And we love the village, we love the people, we love the congregation and we love to see folks gathered in church on a Sunday.
- Maggie was reminding me, Margaret, as she always gets called when she's here, was reminding me that it's 40 years since she became a member here in the congregation.
- Because of her age, she can't remember if it was the March one or the September one, but it was 40 years this year. And she looks back on those times, we both look back on those times, we remember the folks that were here then, look back on them with great affection.
- And all the folks that we've known in the years since as well, and you've always been nothing but kind to us. So we look back with great affection and we continue to have that same great affection.
- [ 1 : 1 5 ] And nothing pleases us better than seeing the church here prospering and growing. And we look forward to seeing more of the kind of encouragement you've had this weekend. We look forward to hearing and seeing more of that in days to come as we're spared.
- Let me bring us to God in worship. We sing to his praise in Psalm 116. It's the traditional version, page 395.
- Page 395, Psalm 116. I love the Lord, because my voice and prayers he did hear. I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.
- We can sing verses 1 to 7 of Psalm 116. If you're able, do please stand to sing to God's praise. I love the Lord, because my voice and prayers he did hear.
- I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.
- [ 2 : 3 8 ] Oh, my God, the courts and sorrows still have a big compass round.
- The grace of heaven took hold on me. I, while I live, I'm troubled, found.
- Upon the name of God, the Lord, And did I fall and sing?
- Delivered thou my soul, O Lord, I do thee humbly pay.
- God merciful and righteous, Ye gracious, it's our Lord.
- [ 4 : 0 7 ] God saves the meek, I was brought, though. He did me help afford.
- O God, my soul, do thou return, Come to thy quiet rest.
- For much of thy love, O Lord, To thee, this bounty he hath expressed.
- Let's turn to God in prayer. Let's pray. Lord our God, what an amazing thing it is that we can come and sing these words, I love the Lord because he heard my voice and my cry.
- What an amazing thing it is that any of us sinners should be able to say such a thing. But it's all because of your grace and your love.

- [ 5 : 40 ] If it's you that has reached down to us, if we love you, it's because you first loved us. And we cannot ever imagine the love of the Father for a lost and fallen race.
- We cannot understand why you should have pity upon us. And yet that pity, that compassion, that grace, that love is written in every line of scripture.
- It reminds us of the price that was needed to be paid to accomplish our salvation. And that Jesus paid it and that he paid it all on his cross at Calvary.
- Lord, we thank you that we are written on the palm of his hands. That we are written on his heart. And that he has made promises to us.
- Promises that last through this world. Promises that last into eternity. Things that eye has not seen, ear has not heard.
- [ 6 : 40 ] Not even entered into our hearts other than what has been revealed to us in scripture and by the Spirit. But Lord, you are preparing things for your people. And we bless you that there is a day coming when the day will not end.
- And there will be no night. And there will be no curse. And there will be no more sea. And there will be no more anything that defiles. Nothing that can spoil the rest, the peace, the comfort, the joy of your people.
- When all sin and all opposition will be locked outside forever. And we bless you, Lord God, that you have made these promises to your people. We bless you that you are still gathering a people to yourself.
- As it was said in the days of the Acts. That the Lord was adding to the church daily. Such as should be saved. We marvel as we hear from around the world. Thousands coming to know Christ every single day.
- Sometimes in places we have barely heard of. Other times closer to home. But we thank you, Lord God, that you are still gathering a church. And you will gather them till the last of your flock has gathered in.
- [ 7 : 50 ] And we bless you that the end will not come till then. And that each and every one of them will be safely gathered by the great shepherd. Lord, how we rejoice in your grace.
- How we rejoice that we still live in a day of gospel opportunity. When that word is still proclaimed. When the word goes out to lost sinners.
- To come to know Christ. To know him as their own. And that you are still gathering a people to yourself. We pray for that sense of oneness with your people in every place.
- We pray that for all those that you love, we might love them too. And we pray that you would give us a love for your people in every corner of this world.
- Folks that we'll never meet this side of eternity. Folks who, if we did meet, we couldn't even speak the same language as many of them. But we thank you that we have that universal language of love for Jesus.
- [ 8 : 49 ] And we pray that you would cause your gospel to continue to be proclaimed. Not just here in Tolstair. Not just here in the Western Isles. Not just here in Scotland and the UK.
- But all around the world. And that you're gathering a people to yourself from north and south and east and west. From every nation and language and tribe and culture. You're gathering people.
- Lord, may we be counted amongst them when you bring your folks home to you. We pray that you would continue to fill the vacancies on this island. We thank you for that encouragement from north and east.
- And pray for David Ferguson and his family as they prepare to settle in there. And as that congregation embarks on a new chapter in their congregational life. Lord, may it be a sweet, may it be a blessed, may it be a prosperous new ministry.

And one that sees great and mighty things happening down there in the Southern Isles. We pray for other vacant congregations here and on the mainland.

[ 9 : 53 ] We pray that you would raise up workers for the harvest. It continues to be great. The workers continue to be few. But Lord, you're the Lord of the harvest. You're able to call workers into the harvest field and to equip them for the work.

And we pray that you would continue to do that. And we pray that you would remember the gospel as it is proclaimed here in this village. And in the two churches, we pray that they too may go from strength to strength.

And that your word would be blessed as it goes forth. And that Christ would see even here of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. We pray for every endeavour to propagate the gospel near home and further afield.

We thank you for ministers. We thank you for missionaries. We thank you for the camps work over the summer. We thank you for all the summer outreaches that go on. We thank you for literature ministries and Bible translation ministries.

We thank you for radio ministries and TV ministries. We thank you for online ministries and the marvellous way in which new technology enables the world to get into corners where it might otherwise never get into.

[ 11 : 08 ] Thank you, Lord, that even in our day you are doing these amazing things. We thank you for your people in faraway places, perhaps where persecution is known, where real opposition.

We experience opposition on a small scale, perhaps. But for some folk, it can mean the loss of family.

It can mean the loss of jobs, the loss of homes. The cast into prison. Death itself for some of your people. Exile for others. Lord, remember your folk in these places.

Especially those places where the battle is fierce. And we know there are parts of Africa in particular where ISIS and such groups are wreaking havoc among your people.

And among the Christian villages and towns of that great continent. Lord, we pray for endurance for your people. We pray for great patience. We pray for courage. We pray for faith.

[ 12 : 07 ] That they would be strong even in the face of such hostility, such violence. We pray, gracious God, that you would encourage your people, deepen their faith and cause them to remember that for those who endure to the end, they shall be saved.

And there is a crown of life kept for all who keep the faith in Jesus. We pray that you would continue to remember the dark spots of the world.

We remember those troubled, war-torn places that are so much on our hearts and on our minds. We think of the war in Ukraine. We think of the ongoing conflict so long now.

So dispiriting. So difficult. We think of that situation. We think of the Middle East. We think of the situation in Israel and in Gaza and in the West Bank and in Lebanon.

And all these places like a powder keg erupting. And even more explosions ready to happen. Lord, in your grace, we pray your intervention in such places.

[ 13 : 14 ] We pray your protection and safety. We pray for wisdom for those who have to sort out these things diplomatically if they can. As they talk and they negotiate. Give them a God-given wisdom to see the way ahead.

Cause these people, even our own leaders, to look to your word in order that they might find light and wisdom for the way ahead. Not look into human wisdom, but look into the very wisdom of God in order that they might see wisdom that is true and always correct and reliable.

Gracious God, everything that we hold precious to us, we commit into your hands. We commit one another. We commit our loved ones. We commit the cause of Christ.

Praying that you would use us even in the fulfilment of your purposes. We're so small. We're so feeble. But Lord, you're able to use even the weakest saint. And we pray that you would be at work amongst us, doing things beyond our ability in your grace.

And we thank you that you're pleased even to use such people as ourselves in the cause of Christ. May that cause prosper and grow amongst us. May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[ 14 : 31 ] May we know the power of Christ at work in our world. Lord, hear our prayers, we pray. Pardon our every sin. In Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We'll have two readings tonight.

The first one is in Luke chapter 7. Gospel of Luke chapter 7. Gospel of Luke chapter 7.

And we can read at verse 36. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him.

And he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment.

And standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

[ 15 : 44 ] Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she's a sinner.

And Jesus answering said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. And he answered, Say it, teacher. A certain moneylender had two debtors.

One owed 500 denarii and the other 50. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?

Simon answered, The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt. And he said to him, You have judged rightly. In turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, Do you see this woman?

I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet.

[ 16 : 49 ] You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.

But he who is forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, Your sins are forgiven. Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, Who is this?

Who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. So on. Amen. May God bless to us that reading of his own holy word.

We can sing again to his praise this time in Psalm 23. Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. No want shall I know. He makes me lie down where the green pastures grow.

He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow. We can sing Psalm 23. We can sing Psalm 23 to God's praise. Sing Psalm's version. Lord have poems. Amen.

[ 17 : 50 ] I will, because we have fulfilled this time in Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, no one shall I know.

He makes me hide out where the king has just grown. He leads me to rest where the calm waters flow.

What a mumbling steps he brings back to his prayer.

Then straight paths of righteousness make him be saved. And this he has done his great name to display.

Lord, warm in death's valley where darkness is near.

[ 18 : 59 ] Because you are with me, no evil I fear. You're wrong and you're stopping me comfort and cheer.

In the sight of my hand, the satire you spread. The eye of rejoicing you pour on my hand.

My calm, O my frozen, I'm graciously pain. So surely your covenant, mercy and grace, Will follow me closely in all of my ways.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord on my days.

Our second reading tonight is from the Gospel of Mark. Gospel of Mark, chapter 14.

[ 20 : 31 ] Chapter 14. We can read a few verses from the beginning of the chapter. We read that it was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. For they said, not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.

And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly.

And she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor.

And they scolded her. But Jesus said, leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you.

[ 21 : 39 ] And whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money.

And he sought an opportunity to betray him. So on. Amen. May God bless too. Is that further reading from his own holy word? And to his name be the praise and the glory.

We will sing again to his praise this time in Psalm 45. The version on page 56. Page 56. Psalm 45.

And we can sing from verse 6. Your royal throne, O God, will last throughout eternity. Your kingdom's scepter will be one of truth and equity. So on to the end of verse 11, Psalm 45, page 56.

[ 22 : 48 ] Verses 6 to 11. To God's praise. Amen. Amen. Will have said, Lord, we've said, Lord, we'll be one of truth and equity.

Anethically, your God has made you gay.

Because you care for righteousness and wickedness you hate.

And thou, O Marancassia, in fragrant robes you're clar.

From palaces of ivory, strange music makes you glad.

[ 24 : 33 ] A woman of your court, his daughters take their stand.

Her royal blood, in finest gold, appears at your right hand.

Oh, God, listen and give you. Consider what I see.

You must forget your father's house, your people far away.

Because your beauty is so great, that King is held in throne.

[ 25 : 55 ] He is your Lord, give him respect, before him humbly fall.

Turn with me again, please, to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14. Mark's Gospel, chapter 14. And we can read again at verse 3.

While Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.

As I've already said a couple of times, it's a great privilege to come to a communion season where we can focus on the love of Christ.

His love, his grace, his devotion to his father, first of all, and his desire to do the father's will at all times. But also his devotion to us, which is, in the end, what we're celebrating and commemorating as we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

[ 27 : 34 ] But it's also, as we've said, a good time to reflect on our own devotion to him and to question ourselves as to why we should love him, why we do love him, maybe why we don't love him more.

But to remind ourselves, to refresh ourselves, to bask, again, in devotion to him who is devoted to us. And as we come to this passage tonight, I think it enables us indeed to consider that whole area of devotion to Christ.

It's what we see exemplified in this woman, perhaps I should say these women, that we've been reading about in our readings tonight, because at the risk of causing confusion, I've read two different stories about two different women.

And sometimes we get confused and we think it's the story about one woman and one incident that happened. It's not. It's the story of two different women and the things that happened to them.

So I don't want us to be confused. Let me just say that the first reading we had in Luke chapter 7 is the only place in the four Gospels where that story is recorded.

[ 28 : 56 ] The second reading we had in Mark chapter 14 is recorded by Matthew and Mark and John. And so across the four Gospels, we come across these two different stories about two different women.

And tonight, although I want to focus on Mark chapter 14, if you're wanting to follow along in your Bibles, you might want to keep a finger or a bookmark in John chapter 12, because that gives us many insights into the story.

And the Gospels work that way. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they all write their account of the life of Jesus, but some tell things that none of the others do. Sometimes they tell things that all four tell.

Sometimes there are details in Mark's version that's different from the details in John's version. Or Luke tells us things about the same story, but the details are different in Matthew's version of the story.

They don't contradict each other. They kind of fulfil each other and complement each other. And so it is with the story of this lady in Mark chapter 14, who is, of course, Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

[ 30 : 07 ] Now, I say I don't want to cause confusion, but I did want to read the earlier story from Luke chapter 7. And that's about an unknown woman. We don't know her name.

She's simply described as a sinful woman. She comes to the home of a man called Simon the Pharisee, where Jesus has been invited to eat. Possibly that incident happens a year, maybe even two years before the later incident with Mary, that we'll be focusing on tonight.

The first woman, she's of ill reputation in the community. Simon the Pharisee is kind of appalled that she's in the house in the first place.

Appalled that Jesus, surely he would know what kind of woman this is, and he's allowing him to touch her, allowing her to touch him. Why would he do that?

Does he not know what kind of woman this is? And we read that she cries, her tears fall on his feet, she pours perfume on his feet, and Jesus responds by forgiving her her sins, much to the indignation and horror of some of the people that are around.

[ 31 : 22 ] How can he forgive sins? How can anybody do that? But he talks about her love is so great. She knows she's been forgiven much.

And that's the thrust of the story in Luke chapter 7. The other story that we're reading in Mark 14, for example, features the lady we know as Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

This happens, as I say, perhaps two years later, certainly a year later, happens just before the crucifixion. Perhaps a week, perhaps less than a week, before Christ is to be crucified.

Not in the home of Simon the Pharisee, but in the home of a man called Simon the leper. Bit of confusion there, it seems to us, but Simon the leper, different from Simon the Pharisee. This lady, Mary, she comes, as she too breaks a jar of alabaster ointment, pours it on his head, not just his feet, pours it on his head and his feet.

She's already a Christian woman. We've already seen her, met her over the last two sermons we've been preaching. She is doing this as an expression of the love she already feels for Christ, the devotion she feels for Christ, the forgiveness she already knows is hers.

[ 32 : 43 ] So there are similarities in the two stories and in the two women, and at the same time there's differences. But the one I want to really focus on, using some help from the first story, is the story of Mary, because we've been thinking about Martha and Mary and Lazarus this weekend.

And it's worth saying at this stage that both incidents, although they're different, they both provoke a reaction, don't they?

They both provoke a reaction. So Simon the Pharisee and his fellow Pharisees and his fellow table guests, they're appalled because of the way they perceive this sinful woman to be, and they can't believe that Jesus is allowing her to touch him.

Let alone to tolerate her presence in the place. How she's got in, where she's come from, is not clear. But they think if he was a prophet, he should know better than to mix with women like this.

And in the second incident with Mary, the reaction comes from Judas and from the other disciples, going, what a waste of money. What a waste of money.

[ 33 : 59 ] They know how precious is the ointment that Mary has poured over Jesus. The footnotes here in your Bible might tell you that it's something like 300 days wages.

Can you imagine spending, what's that, 9, 10 months of your annual salary on a perfume and then pouring that perfume out in one act? Can you imagine that kind of cash?

And that's what Judas and the disciples are saying. What a waste of money. That's the reaction that Mary's sacrifice gives.

But Jesus gives an explanation for it. He says it's all about forgiveness. It's all about the sense of forgiveness that these women feel. It's about the love they feel for me.

It's about the devotion they have for me. They know I'm devoted to them. They know I'm their saviour. And they want to express that in whatever way they feel that they can.

[ 35 : 01 ] The love of Christ evokes these reactions in these women. Perhaps Mary, the later episode, a year, two years on, perhaps she's inspired by the first woman.

She remembers that act of devotion. And maybe says, I need to do something similar. We don't know. We don't know our motive exactly. But I think it's most likely that she at the very least knows of that incident.

It must have been well spoken of. Luke has found it in his research led by the Holy Spirit. And he's included it in his gospel. It must have been a known story. Jesus' explanation for the first woman is it's because she knows how much she's been forgiven.

Because she knows how much she's been forgiven. She loves much. He that is forgiven little loves little. And that might cause us even just to think about our own selves.

How much do I love Jesus? How much do I love the saviour who loved me and gave himself for me? How much do I love him? And if I'm forced to think about it and I think, I don't know, maybe I don't think about it enough.

[ 36 : 18 ] Maybe it's because I forget how much I've been forgiven. Isn't it possible that we don't think enough about what we've been forgiven? Do we realise what we're saved from for believers at all?

Do we realise what Christ has done for us? And what he's saved us from? And what he's saved us to? Because it's as we think about that, says Jesus, and we realise how much we're forgiven.

We will love much. He says, this woman, she realises how much she's been forgiven. And the upshot of that is she loves much and she wants to express in this way what he means to her.

With the second woman, with Mary, Jesus' testimony is she has done what she could. She has done what she could. There are many things I'm sure that Mary couldn't have done.

But Jesus' assessment of her is she has done what she could. Verse 8 of Mark chapter 14. She has anointed my body beforehand for burial.

[ 37 : 25 ] And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her. It will be a never-ending story.

We come across that phrase, don't we? It's a book, it's a film. And the never-ending story, well, that's Mary's story. And here are we, 2,000 years later. What, 2,000 miles away? 3,000 miles away?

I'm not sure how far away that we are from the Holy Land. We're talking about her. We, too, are remembering what she's done. And Christ's words are fulfilled once again in our presence tonight.

We're remembering what she's done. As Jesus said, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what Mary has done will be told in memory of her.

She has done what she could. What a testimony. I wonder if Christ could say that of us. We've done what we could. So-and-so has done what he could.

[ 38 : 25 ] Much we can't do, no doubt. Many things we're not equipped for. Many things we're not able to do. Would Jesus say of you and me, he has done what he could. She has done what she could.

Her self-sacrifice. Her faith. Her love. Her devotion. In response to the devotion of Christ.

To his grace in her life. It should make us think again about our devotion to him. My devotion to him. What does he mean to me?



How do I respond to that? These are things that we've been thinking about this weekend. It's good for us to think about them again tonight. Let me break this down into just two things.

Firstly, Mary's love for Jesus. And in the second place, Jesus' love for Mary. Very simple. Mary's love for Jesus. And Jesus' love for Mary. Thinking about this.

[ 39 : 28 ] Mary's love for Jesus. It's all the more interesting what she does when you think of what's going on around her. Because we see that in Mark 14 and verse 1, the chief priests and the scribes, who should know better, they're meant to be the spiritual leaders of the land, they're seeking how to arrest Jesus by stealth and how to kill him.

That's the context in which Mary does this. And you'll see that immediately afterwards, in verse 10, following this incident, Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.

And they gave him money because they were glad to find out that they had an opportunity. In other words, Mary is surrounded by a certain coldness. Yes, there are people who are warm to Christ, but in the wider culture around her, there are those who are opposed to Christ and those who are cold toward Christ and those who don't share her love and devotion for Christ.

And yet here she is, in the midst of that coldness, burning brightly with love for the Lord Jesus. And shouldn't that remind us that any coldness on our own part, we can't blame on the culture around us.

We can't say, yes, but in a climate like this and when the church is, when the church perhaps is weaker than it has been in the past, in these days that might not be a day of nothings, but it seems like a day of small things, it's no surprise if I don't burn very brightly as a Christian.

[ 41 : 11 ] But here's Mary giving us an example and a proof of how you can burn brightly as a Christian even though roundabout there's a coldness in the culture, even a coldness in those that supposedly are supportive of God and his cause.

But no, there's these people around them. We can't blame the situation in the church. We can't blame other people. Do I have a warmth and a love and a devotion for Christ in my own heart?

These are things we ought to ask ourselves. It didn't stop Mary burning bright. It didn't stop her from showing and expressing her love for Christ. Her love was real and you and I need to make sure that our love for him is real too.

We're told, I think, by more than one of these gospel writers, as I say, this story is in Matthew, Mark and John. We're told that these incidents happen or this incident happens in the home of a man called Simon the Leper.

We don't know who that is. We know he can't be an actual leper at this point because if he was, he'd be living in the leper's colony somewhere on the outskirts of town.

[ 42 : 27 ] He must be, to have a name like that, he must be a healed leper. Somebody who has had leprosy and has now been cured of it. Is he somebody that Jesus has cured?

Possibly. We don't know. But, he's cured. And for a leper, leprosy was a living death in those days. You might as well die because your life as you knew it was over, you could no longer engage with your family.

The fear of contagion was such that you had to stay away from everybody. Everybody was terrified of getting it because your life in any meaningful sense was over. People would throw food to you because you couldn't come in and purchase it yourself.

You were an outcast if you were a leper. It was a living death. And until you died, you were a leper unless somehow, miraculously, you got cured.

So for Simon the leper to be in a house in Bethany means that he is a cured leper and in a sense, metaphorically, he's back from the dead.

[ 43 : 36 ] He's back from the dead. Like Lazarus, who actually was dead and is back from the dead. And they're both there in this household.

I think it's clearer in John's gospel. They're both there in this household where a dinner has been organised for Jesus. And the implication, I think, is that it's out of gratitude for Jesus, which is what makes me think it's possibly Christ who has healed Simon the leper.

It's a gathering for Jesus. And the families will be there. Mary and Martha and Lazarus are there. again, I think it's in John.

I don't want to keep turning back and forth in the gospels, but I'm pretty sure it's in John that we read that Mary is going to come in with her ointment. But Martha, who we featured largely yesterday and this morning, Martha is there.

And I love this. It's a little detail you might miss. It says, Martha was serving. And you remember yesterday, Martha was serving too at the time when she was really annoyed with her sister Mary for not helping her often enough.

[ 44 : 48 ] And she ends up being rebuked by Jesus. Martha, Martha, you're too worried about things like this. You know, she'd be more like Mary who's chosen the better part.

Remember that? But here she is and she's serving and there's not a word of rebuke. And that tells me that there was nothing wrong with Martha serving.

It was her attitude at that time as she was serving. That's what needed rebuked. But now that she's got a better attitude, there's no criticism of her at all for serving in the home of Simon the leper.

Isn't it lovely? She's moved on. She's grown. Spiritually, she's presumably taken that rebuke on board and now she's serving with a much better spirit and a glad heart.

I love that tiny little reference. Martha serving and serving well at this point. So she's there as well and these families seem to have got together and isn't there something in it, a little glimpse, perhaps you might say, of heaven.

[ 45 : 55 ] The marriage supper of the Lamb depicted just in that little group there. there's Jesus feasting, fellowshiping with his beloved people, sitting gathered at the table together with his friends, with his disciples, with the devoted, with those who love him and with them who he loves.

The resurrected, the back from the dead. they're there and they're gathered together in honour and in praise of the Saviour. Isn't there something wonderful about that?

And into that crowd, that happy crowd, enters this woman and in Mark chapter 14 it's only a woman came in with an alabaster flask.

But John tells us who it was. He tells us it's Mary. Mary, the sister of Lazarus. I'm going to look it up on this occasion. Maybe I should keep something in my Bible for me.

They had a dinner for him there where Lazarus was whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there. Martha served and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.

[ 47 : 20 ] It's Mary as revealed as being the woman of Mark chapter 14. And she comes in and she comes in with this costly ointment and she breaks the flask that it's in the jar the bottle whatever you want to call it she breaks it and she pours it over his head like an anointing.

If you go back to the Psalms you go back to the Old Testament you go back to the anointing of kings the anointing of priests oil broken and poured over the head.

Cheese essentially saying this is my king this is my saviour and he deserves this. He loves her family they love him she loves him he's the life giver he's given life to Simon the leper and he's given life to Lazarus and spiritually he's given life to Mary and Martha as well.

She could have used water she could have used water just to symbolise what she was doing but instead she uses this expensive nard and she breaks it so it's not like a grudging so it's like don't waste too much it's not like that it's not even a and keep some back she breaks the bottle it's all gone the whole thing gone given to him she breaks it you think of the the widow who gave the two nights and Jesus commended her might not be much to you and me but she's given everything and that tells us about the state of her heart and her soul well it's the same with Mary she's given everything this precious precious ointment well does McShane again we spoke about McShane this morning McShane talking on this passage says she's broken the alabaster flask of her heart of her heart she's pouring out her heart to Jesus not just her perfume it's extravagant it's sacrificial it's devotional it's over the top really it's her nest egg this would be her pension this is this is what she would have to live on this is the rainy day thing that she's keeping in the cupboard the security the financial security for the future and she pours it out on Jesus and she doesn't spare it she breaks the jar and says all for Jesus and she does it in love she does it in love remember the great chapter 1 Corinthians 13 the great love passage and I can do all these things but if I don't do it with love it's meaningless pointless doesn't mean anything if I give away all I have this is what you could look at Mary here if I give away all I have if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love

I gain nothing I gain nothing unless it's done with love and mate Jesus knows it's done with love he knows what she's doing there's a sense in which that kind of wealthy over the top lavish worship can be tacky maybe you've been in churches or church buildings or whatever and the ornamentation is way over the top have you been to Rome and you've been around the Vatican and you see the wealth the riches the splendor and you think what's this all about what's this got to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ it just comes over as tacky it doesn't speak of devotion and love in that sense it just speaks of extravagance and ridiculous wealth but here it's done with love and love for Jesus is always appropriate even a cup of cold water he says given to one in my name is appropriate and there's an expression of love but Mary gives her all and what she seems to be doing is she's seizing an opportunity somehow she knows his death is imminent she knows his death is imminent how does she know even the disciples don't seem to have clocked that they don't seem to realize you know at least three times

[ 51 : 52 ] Jesus has said to his disciples we're going up to Jerusalem the son of man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners he'll be spat on he'll be flogged he'll be crucified he'll be put to death but three days later he'll rise again and the disciples seem to be in denial it kind of goes in one ear and out the other it's just that they don't want to hear it they think no it couldn't happen to him I don't know what it is but they don't seem to really take it seriously it catches them out when it finally happens and yet he's been so clear this is what's going to happen when we get to Jerusalem and I can't help but think I said this morning there's only three times we come across Mary in the Gospels and every time we find her sitting at Jesus' feet that's where she sat last night or yesterday morning it was in the house while Martha was in the kitchen she sat at Jesus' feet listening this morning when she came out to meet him as he arrived in Bethany if you'd been here my brother would not have died she fell at his feet and here she is again at Jesus' feet wiping or pouring her ointment onto his head and onto his feet and I can't help but think her devotion to him is such that she listens to every word he says and she knows if he's headed for

Jerusalem he's heading for death because he said it clearly several times and I can't help but think she is a good listener and she's been listening in a way that the other disciples haven't she knows and what she's doing is as Jesus says she's anointing me for my burial she's anointing me for my burial leave her alone the woman in Luke chapter 7 the anonymous unknown sinful woman she was forgiven much because she loved much and I think we see the same thing about Mary it might not be said explicitly about Mary but it's obviously the same thing isn't it nothing is too much for Jesus nowhere is too lowly for me to position myself for Jesus and she creates this great fragrance that fills the house again one of the gospel writers tells us the house is filled with a fragrance and again it might be worth you and me asking ourselves am I fragrant for Christ does my love for him give a fragrance that is a blessing a source of blessing to others where does my love for

Christ feature is there something fragrant is there anything fragrant about my life we should ask ourselves that and pray that there would be something more fragrant something that can be a blessing to others even as Mary was a blessing to others at that time but we must move on as Mary's love for Jesus need to think in the second place Jesus love for Mary and we read you'd like to think that everybody would realize what a great thing Mary has done but verse four tells us straight off there were some who said to themselves indignantly why was this ointment wasted like this it could have been sold for more than nine ten months wages and given to the poor which sounds very pious doesn't it nothing to do with us but the poor would really benefit from it Matthew tells us in his account that it's the disciples who talk this way you'd like to think they would be better than that it's the disciples that are talking that way John is even more specific it's

Judas who's talking that way he's a thief he loves the money very much and I'm not sure that really giving it to the poor is what he's thinking he's probably thinking it would do well in my own pocket however his own disciples are saying what a waste of money and you think how can they how can they be so lacking in basic charity towards Mary Mary who's fed them Martha and Mary brought them into the house fed them being so kind to them here they are again receiving of Martha and Mary's hospitality and Lazarus and you think can you not give her the benefit of the doubt at least and stop the criticism and say well she must have a reason for doing what she's doing she's such a kind woman you think they're probably saying to themselves she means well I'm sure she's generous but you know really it's a bit over the top in it

Jesus however accepts it Jesus doesn't criticise her at all he accepts it just as he's accepted the hospitality of Simon the leper and the hospitality of Mary and Martha and Lazarus but these critics of hers they're so selfish themselves they're so ungenerous they're so cold hearted that they don't understand her unselfishness and her generosity and her warmth and her love because they don't seem to have it in their own hearts they can't understand how she can be so big hearted about something like this the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his book the Gulag Archipelago he makes a comment at one point about the prisoners shivering in Siberia for the guards around them in their great coats and look on without sympathy and he makes the point it's impossible for a man who's warm to understand a man who's cold impossible for a man who's warm to understand a man who's cold and that seems to be the case for these disciples they don't understand her warmth because presumably they don't feel that same warmth in their own heart and it's so easy to be critical and grudging if we feel that somebody is more enthusiastic or more zealous than we are ourselves because we want to think that our own level of spirituality perhaps is kind of right we've got the balance right and you see somebody else who's more enthusiastic more spiritual and you think there's no need for that that's a bit much don't need to be like that come on we all love

[ 58 : 29 ] Jesus don't we that's just unnecessary you need to beware that spirit that was the spirit of the disciples that was the spirit of Judas in this room remember the more we feel forgiven the more we'll love and Mary must feel very very forgiven and she knows how much she loves and is devoted to Christ I don't think we had this verse as we sang Psalm 116 but it does say and it doesn't how can I thank the Lord for all he's done how can I thank the Lord for all he's done can't not really not adequately how can we do that and as far as Mary's concerned her money her time her effort her life is not wasted if Jesus doesn't think it is if Jesus doesn't think it's a waste then it's not a waste that's Mary's attitude and that's Jesus attitude as well leave her alone verse 6 why do you trouble her she's done a beautiful thing to me they make this pretense don't they about you know the poor could really have done with that money and well poverty was all around then as well and he said that the poor you always have with you give to them as much as you want you can give to them anytime please give your money to the poor absolutely because he knows that's not really where they're coming from he's saying but nevertheless what she's done for me is not a waste it's not wasteful there are few opportunities left as he knows and as Mary seems to know few opportunities left to show love for

Jesus and Mary has grasped it and she's grasping this opportunity before it's gone others will want to anoint his dead body later in the week she's already done it in advance those that are truly spiritual amongst them could give to Christ and the church and still give to the poor plenty time plenty expression plenty opportunity to do that but Jesus is no she's done what she could she's done what she could that's an amazing testimony for Jesus to say of anybody I fear Jesus will say to me one day you didn't do half of what you could have done but he said of Mary she's done what she could all her critics have done is complain where have they showed their love for Christ how have they expressed their devotion of Christ Jesus says leave her alone and she might be looking at all these angry annoyed indignant faces around the room but there's at least one face smiling back at her saying leave her alone and that's the one that matters to her leave her alone says Jesus is aware of the criticism leave her alone she's done a beautiful thing for me leave her alone and that's all

I think that matters to Mary he knows her heart he knows her love he knows her devotion and it's reflecting his love for her she's reflecting it back to him if he says well done does anything else matter whatever anybody else says to you in life if the Lord says at the end of the day well done that's all that really matters isn't it that's all that should matter to you and to me we never really know the big picture do we as I say later in the week the woman would go to anoint Jesus dead body at the tomb perhaps as little as two days later but they're going to find that he's not there and there is no body to anoint and it doesn't matter because Mary's already done it a few days earlier she's grasped the moment she's taken the opportunity she was a good listener and she knew that the end was near and where Jesus was headed that head that she's pouring out her perfume on was just about to be crowned with thorns those feet that she's pouring her perfume on about to be pierced with nails she's already anointed it for burial

Christ's mind is on Mary and it's on his people and it's on his father's will and it's on the death that he knows he has to accomplish as part of his father's will that's where his mind is Judas's mind is on the money that's what he's interested in Mary's mind is on Jesus that's a great place to be isn't it that's a great place to be where's your mind today tonight at this time is it on Jesus is he the one that means more to you than anything when you think about what he's done when you think about his broken body his shed blood that we've been commemorating today her mind is on Jesus that's why her story is the never ending story and why it'll always be told because she loves the Lord Jesus it talks about her love for him and it talks about his love for her and the story will go on forever some people will pride themselves delude themselves on

I did what I could I've done all that I could ever have been expected to do for the church for the cause of Christ for Jesus himself and it may well be delusion and done nothing of the sort Mary has this testimony from the Lord Jesus she's done what she could what an amazing thing to have said of you and if Jesus says it then it's through if Jesus says she's done what she could then she has done what she could and she's not just devoted Mary you might think he is Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus like a nun all filled with spirituality no here she's showing how practical she is in the way she expresses it expresses her love for Jesus she's expressed it anyway in the hospitality and other ways but here she is expressing her love for Jesus it comes out in this most practical way she's anointed his body for burial her faith is active we see

[ 64 : 58 ] Martha yesterday she was too active this morning we've seen the tremendous expression of her faith you're the Christ the son of God who was coming into the world she's a woman of great faith and here she is active again but serving now in a better spirit there's a lovely balance about these two women when you take all three of these passages together isn't there and we see more of Mary and we see more of Martha and you say God bless them don't you love the way they are that blend of practicality and spirituality they love Christ and it leaves a fragrance for others that's a lovely thing to think about isn't it does your love for Christ leave a fragrance for others it ought to for anything like Martha and Mary I was reading about brother Andrew the little Dutchman that took his little blue Volkswagen beyond the iron curtain in communist times going to visit believers stuck there bringing them bibles bringing them encouragement from the from the west reminding them they hadn't been forgotten died maybe three or four years ago an old man in his 90s by now a faithful servant of

Christ all his days and as he drew near the end he was asked at one point in an interview what would you want on your gravestone when the time comes and he thought about it and he said and he thought about these words that Jesus said to Mary and he says maybe maybe he should say he did what he couldn't you know in other words what he never could have done by his own ability and strength he did what Christ enabled him to do he did what he couldn't and he thought nah that's maybe a bit pious and he thought maybe I should say maybe I should say he's not here he has risen and he thought maybe that's again that's too grandiose for me and then he remembered the gravestone of another writer Oswald Chambers and apparently on his gravestone it says Oswald Chambers a disciple of Jesus

Christ and he says that's I'm happy with that if you put that on my gravestone that's me happy I will be content to know that that's the way I'm remembered a disciple of Jesus Christ I think that's the way Mary would be happy to be remembered I think it's the way Martha would be happy to be remembered I think that's the fragrance that they would love to exude beyond their normal lifetime that fragrance that still comes down to us tonight this weekend as we've read about them the fragrance of Christ in their lives how wonderful if we can walk away from this place with a fragrance how wonderful we can go back into your home your life your school your work wherever it is and exude a fragrance for Christ a love for Christ a sense that Christ loves me and I love him go and live that fragrance that too will be a never ending story that will redound and echo into eternity and then we'll find out just how the Lord used simple people like you and me and Mary and Martha and Lazarus in the building of his kingdom may we be truly devoted to him as we remember his devotion to us let's pray our gracious

God and saviour how we thank you for the fragrance that Christ himself has left us may it exude forth from us out into the wider world may we be his people may we do what we cannot do just by ourselves may we do through grace what you will enable us to do may it be enough may it be true that it could be said of us at some point he she has done what they could may we know Jesus better may we love Jesus better as we consider the forgiveness that he has given to us as sinners may we love him better may we love him more may we be fragrant for him we ask all in his name and for his sake Amen our closing praise is in psalm 72 the version on page 314 page 314 his name forever shall endure last like the sun it shall men shall be blessed in him and blessed all nations shall him call verses 17 to 19 of psalm 72 page 314 we can stand and sing to God's praise sape forgive may we see for the his name the man shall be blessed

In heaven well, all nations shall him fall.

[ 70 : 31 ] Blessed be the Lord our God, the God of Israel.

For he, our Lord, doth wander smart in glory, our ex-salm.

Blessed be his glorious name to all eternity.

The whole earth is glory filled.

Amen. So let it be. Amen. Now in a moment, those who are staying for the fellowship will be having tea and whatever else comes with it.

[ 71 : 53 ] And so I've been asked to say grace just now as well as the benediction. Lord God, we give thanks for all that you provide us with. Whether that's spiritual blessings, whether it's physical, day-to-day, everyday mundane blessings.

Help us to see your hand in all of it and to be thankful. And now may your grace, mercy and peace from Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore.

Amen.