**Reflections – 6-12 April 2025**

**Bible study on John 12:1-8**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord, we bring before you the passions of our lives:  
the people who matter most to us,  
the things that hurt us most,  
everything we have lost,  
the questions we struggle to answer.  
Help us to know how much we matter  
and to find our answers in you.  
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

**Jesus Anointed at Bethany**

**12**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 a pint[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26584a)] 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.[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26586b)]” **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,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2012&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26589c)] 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.

**Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King**

**12**The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

Each Gospel has an account of Jesus being anointed by a woman. In Matthew 26:6-13 and in Mark 14:3-9, an unnamed woman anoints Jesus’ head in the house of Simon the leper at Bethany, ‘two days before the Passover’ (Mark 14:1). In Luke 7:36-50, during Jesus’ earlier ministry in Galilee, an unnamed ‘woman in the city, who was a sinner’ anoints his feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. In John, the anointing is ‘six days before the Passover’. As in Matthew and Mark, the anointing is with very costly ointment and takes place in Bethany, just east of Jerusalem where Jesus is about to be crucified. But uniquely, in John’s narrative, the woman is named. She is Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, and her anointing of his feet happens in their Bethany home. Importantly, it is part of the extended story (11:1–12:11) of Jesus’ relationship with the three siblings, all of whom he loved (11:5), and whose invitation to dinner he has accepted. He has said to Martha, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’, and she has responded, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe’ (11:25-27). He has raised Lazarus, who has become a living witness to the truth of Jesus’ words. Because of this the chief priests plan to put Lazarus to death (11:53, 12:9-11).

Now Mary anoints him in explicit recognition that there is no way to resurrection without the cross. The fabulous cost of the nard suggests that Mary’s passionate commitment to Jesus is total. And John attributes strong emotions to Jesus, too, in his relationship with the siblings: he is ‘deeply moved’; he ‘began to weep’; and is ‘again greatly disturbed’ at the tomb of Lazarus (11:33-38). His passionate commitment to all those he loves is about to cost him nothing less than his life. He recognises that Mary has kept the ointment ‘for the day of my burial’ (v.7). There will be no anointing after his death because he will be raised. By her costly act, Mary proclaims Jesus’ death and resurrection and commits herself to him passionately.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

A well-known Jewish teaching in Jesus’ day said, ‘Just as the fragrance of a good perfume spreads from the bedroom to the dining room, so does a good name spread from one end of the world to another.’ Perhaps one meaning of this story is that the good news of the gospel will eventually spread to the whole world. What is the good news? At this point, it’s not entirely clear; Jesus gives a hint: ‘you do not always have me’. The clues in the story can help us to find the answer. Like Paul, Jesus is guiding us to invest our wealth, time and energy in what really matters in life.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| Mary anoints Jesus' feet |  |

**Questions**

* What are you most passionate about, and why?
* What strikes you most about Mary’s act of passion and worship?
* What sacrifices are you prepared to make for your faith?

**Prayer**

Lord, we give thanks and praise as we:  
**P**ress on in  
**A**nticipation of riches ahead,  
**S**inging with joy as we  
**S**hed the past, realising the  
**I**mportance of your grace.  
**O**ur old life is dead.  
Now our trust is in you.  
**Lord, we give thanks and praise as we move forward with you.**  
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

All that makes me happy, I place at your feet, Lord.  
All that makes me sad, I place at your feet, Lord.  
Everything that matters, I place at your feet, Lord.  
Be with me every step of the way in my life.  
**Amen.**