

April 14, 2019
Lesson 8: Called to Remember
Scripture: Matthew 26: 1-13

Context:

Today's lesson as we approach Holy Week is about how we are called to remember. The appropriate story we are given is the story of the woman and the alabaster jar of expensive perfume that is poured over Jesus's head. As we read her story, we are reminded that we are called to integrate worship and service in our everyday lives.

The story begins though with Jesus as he speaks of his own death. When Jesus has finished all the teachings he needs to pass on, he tells his disciples that as the Passover comes, the Human One (Son of Man in some translations,) will be handed over and crucified. We do not know if the disciples understand what is going on as they are not given a response.

However, Jesus's words are being confirmed as the chief priests and elders of the people gather in the courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest. These individuals have not gathered to make plans for the Passover directly. The "cunning tricks" they discuss involve bearing false witness against Jesus to get their way.

However, they make the decision to plot and condemn Jesus after the Passover. During this time, it was customary for the procurator to station extra troops in Jerusalem at Passover because the crowds would have been very excitable at the time.¹ The crowds would be looking for the Messiah to appear and make everything right. Jesus's arrest would have caused an uproar.

The plot transitions to Jesus and his disciples at a house in Bethany, enjoying dinner together. However, in the midst of the dinner, an unnamed woman shows up. She takes an alabaster jar of expensive perfume and pours out it over Jesus's head. There is no motive revealed and most ancient and modern readers see the anointing simply as an act of love.² The woman is giving something she possesses to share with someone else she loves.

Yet not all individuals are happy. The disciples are in the midst of the Passover season. They know that according to rabbinic teaching, there was special focus on almsgiving and giving to the poor during Passover week.³ This woman has chosen not follow through with that act and instead has chosen to take that money and pour it upon Jesus.

Jesus turns this into a teaching moment though. This act is not one that is fruitless. This woman has shown a true good work and given an example for people of all time to follow. She shows the true spirit of a disciple as she both anoints her king and also

¹ Douglas R.A. Hare, "Matthew," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1990), 292.

² *Ibid.*, 293.

³ *Ibid.*, 294.

prepares him for burial. Her act is one of worship.

Application

Whenever I have heard this text preached, the focus or theme word is “worship.” When this woman comes to anoint Jesus, she is exhibiting what it means to lead a life of worship. Worship is pure adoration of our Lord in what we say and do.

It is often tempting to relegate the word “worship” to Sunday morning. Of course that time is sacred. We have praise bands and choirs, electric guitars and pipe organs, bright lights or stained glass; all for the specific act of giving thanks and praise to our Lord. Today we add the procession of those shouting “Hosanna,” and waving palms as we come to celebrate the King of all Kings.

Yet a life of worship is not just relegated for Sunday morning. A life of worship is one that transcends Sunday mornings. Even in the case of this woman, her act came before Jesus’s death and we never hear her being a part of the crowd that welcomed him with palm branches. This is a holy moment where she pours herself out lavishly for our Lord that is a part of her giving back to God.

You contrast her life with that of the chief priests and the elders who gathered to condemn Jesus. These were the people who were supposed to know about a life of worship. They were supposed to know about the right prayers to pray and the correct amount of incense on the altar. Yet they were not thinking of worship as they plotted and planned to kill Jesus.

I hope that as we prepare for Holy Week and beyond, we can remember what it means to lead a life of worship. Worship is not just for the singers in the praise band or the massive choir on Easter morning. It isn’t just for the preacher who stands up to preach every single Sunday trying to find the right words to convey about who God is in our lives. It isn’t just for the church staff that runs around and tries to make sure there are offerings for everyone on Sunday morning. Those are all a part of worship but they are just part of the team.

Worship and the Christian life is not a spectator sport. All people are to be searching for ways to lead a life of worship. Like the woman with the alabaster jar, all of us are responsible for the way we lead our lives and finding ways to glorify God in all that we say and do. All of us have been given that privilege and honor to be mature disciples of our Lord looking for ways to lead a life of worship beyond the time that we spend together as a community of faith on Sunday morning.

How do you lead a life of worship? How does what you do or learn on Sunday prepare you for the rest of the week? Are you like the chief priests and elders, the disciples, or the unnamed woman? As you think about this Holy Week and how Jesus is the one who has given us life, remember that he calls you to a life of worship. Remember the example of the woman with the alabaster jar and the example that she gives for all of us to follow.

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