

Monday

Our story begins today on the day before Palm Sunday. It is set in the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary where they are having a dinner in honour of Jesus. The twelve disciples are there, and the sense is, probably, a good number of others too. It's a party and Lazarus's home is full of people and joy.

When Mary enters the scene, she may hardly have been noticed. People are talking maybe listening to Jesus or, perhaps asking Lazarus to talk about how Jesus had brought him back from death. I wonder what each person noticed first, Mary or the smell of the perfume? I suppose that would depend on where you were, and what conversation you were paying attention to at that moment but, very soon everyone was looking at Mary, wondering what she was doing and why.



There are a number of things that you could use perfumed oil for, or that people in Jesus's day would have used it for.

- It could be used to anoint someone very special, perhaps a king.
- It could be used in worship, poured out on an altar as a gift to your chosen God.
- It could be used as part of a burial to prepare the body and cover up the bad odours.

Take a few moments to think about which one of these comes to your mind as you hear this story:

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

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

⁴But 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.” ⁶He 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. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

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

John 12:1-11 New International Version (NIV)

We can’t really know which of these is in Mary’s mind, perhaps she wasn’t too sure herself, and perhaps it is a combination of many things but whatever she is thinking about as she wipes his feet with her hair kneeling at his feet, it is as personal as anyone could ever get.

As I try to think of what may have been on Mary’s mind, I find more questions than answers. Perhaps Mary’s actions were motivated more by her heart than her head. It can often be difficult put into words what we are thinking, to explain what we know in our hearts.

Mary’s hope was in Jesus whatever that meant. Mary had faith in who he was. There are many things in life that we will struggle to understand and that we may never understand. For these times our faith needs to be something that is held deep within our hearts.

Let’s pray

Lord Jesus,
We acknowledge that you are too great for our minds to comprehend. We are sorry that our hearts are often too hard to receive you. Soften our hearts with your love and fill them with faith in you. That our hope in you will be as secure as your love for us. Amen.

