**SUNDAY, APRIL 3, 2022 - LENT V**

**JOHN 12, 1 - 8**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, Oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

John tells the story of Jesus’ ministry rather differently than the Synoptic gospels; he includes many details not found elsewhere, Jesus’ age for example. And so it is with this morning’s passage, telling a little more about the very close friendship Jesus had with the family of Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Jesus is only a few days away from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we now celebrate as Palm Sunday. And it was only a short while ago that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. So now it is only six days before Passover, and a big dinner is being provided for Jesus and at least some of his closest disciples.

Mary is present at the dinner, which Martha was serving. But Mary is here acting more like a servant than a daughter of the house. Her emotions are very great, full of foreboding, she has, along with the disciples, some idea of what lies ahead, perhaps not the exact day, but counting on our fingers, we know, because we have been telling each other the story for nearly two thousand years, we know that six days from the time of the dinner John was recounting, Jesus’ maimed and crucified body was lying, wrapped in a linen shroud and costly herbs in the stone tomb donated by Joseph of Arimathea, whilst the pilgrims and local Jews celebrated, as is, and was, right and proper, Passover, the foundational event of the Jewish religion. We now see Easter as the foundational event of our existence as Christians. Very vivid in Mary’s mind and heart must have been Jesus’ recently bringing back her beloved brother Lazarus from his tomb.

We remember that for some time now, Jesus had been telling his followers that he would be executed, but would be coming back. His mission: to redeem us from our sins.

Still, it must have been difficult, if not outright impossible, for Peter and crew to understand what Jesus was getting at. It is foreign to our understanding too. Still, Mary felt a sense of coming doom.

She took a whole pound of spikenard ointment (show jam jar), a whole pound of it, worth a year’s wages for a semi-skilled worker, call it $30,000 in today’s money, John underlines its value by having the thief Judas protest the waste. And Mary does something more to underline her devotion to Jesus, she wiped his feet with her hair. In the Middle East in those days, and to a large extent nowadays, a woman reveals her hair only to the very closest people in her life. She is here acting like a servant, foot washing is the task of a lowly slave provided by a host to show honour to a guest. We are seeing a huge, enormous gesture of love and devotion.

And when Judas, the villain and hypocrite, protests, Jesus comes again to Mary’s defence: “Leave her alone” he says, “she bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.” What we are seeing here is a phenomenon nowadays called preemptive mourning. When you know someone is going to die, you go and pay your respects, take your leave. Possibly even iron out your differences.

My younger daughter was in high school good friends with a lassie of Scottish descent. Zoe one day realized that her mother had set aside $10,000 for airfare so the whole family could attend her grandmother’s funeral in Scotland, someday in the hopefully distant future. Zoe protested; she told her mother that she was pretty sure Granny would rather see her daughter and grandchildren in life, while she could enjoy the visit. It took Zoe’s mother all summer to think it over, and phone her Mum in Scotland, and explain the situation. They went over to Scotland for Christmas. I never did find out who attended the funeral, because my daughter and Zoe lost track of each other in the following years. But I’m pretty sure that Christmas together was a very joyful one, if a little tinged with melancholy.

So that is one takeaway from today’s gospel portion: express your love to the people who matter before you lose them and it’s too late. In fact, because accidents do happen, and death can be awful sudden, express your love frequently. Don’t let feuds and ongoing disputes fester, unless you want them on your conscience later. As Dr. Phil says, Do you want to be right or to be happy?

Lent is a period of mourning, both for the upcoming death of our Saviour, our Redeemer, the author of our salvation, and for the sins we commit, have committed, and keep on committing, that made it necessary for Jesus, the son of God, to willingly go to the cross and endure a humiliating and excruciating death, every pang of which he felt because he was living in a human body. Mary and the apostles had been told what was going to happen, but how could they possibly have understood? Jesus save Lazarus, but who could save Jesus?

At this very low point in Lent, we are called upon to repent our sins, and remember last week, we saw how the Prodigal Son did humbly and sincerely repent and was so handsomely forgiven by his father, and we know that God forgives us too, when we repent our sins. The kind of things, that when we wake up in the night and think of them, we writhe in embarrassment and guilt. Those things, the things we don’t want to remember, far less dwell on. Yes, those things. Repent, my friend, God will forgive, for Jesus’ sake.

Our challenge this week is twofold, first, to tell our loved ones that we love them, and second to take out our souls and have a good hard look at our failings, and say we’re sorry, really, truly sorry. Jesus had it a lot harder than us, and there were no sins on his conscience; the least we can do is examine ourselves strictly.

I don’t like to be sad and downcast, tragedy isn’t really my thing. Jesus did so much of his teaching around the dinner table after all. So I have happy news again: the Holy Spirit is on our side, to help and guide us, to give good advice. In this room, at this time, in all places, at all times, in our hearts, the great Comforter. How cool is that? Amen.