



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
3-17-13

I'm not sure we would have liked, or I would have liked having either Mary or Judas as members of our congregation. Let's be honest here – I'm not sure that as a parent I would have wanted my children hanging around Judas and Mary. I'm not even sure I would have wanted them hanging out with Jesus. I mean – look at their behavior.

Mary seems to make suspect choices – she doesn't help her sister in the kitchen when Jesus visits – instead she hangs out with the menfolk. And now she wastes a **WHOLE LOT** of expensive perfume bathing someone's feet. I know it was Jesus' feet- but still.

What would you think if one of our parishioners –a Mary – walked in here one Sunday and opened her duffel bag – pouring out \$6,000 in bills onto the floor and then lighting them with a match. As the bills burn she tells us all that they are providing incense unto the Lord.

We'd sure as heck be shocked and even if we liked her we'd be talking about her and her action for a **LONG** time! And I just think that some of the talk would include what **GOOD** things could have been done with that much money.

On the other hand – didn't that Nard – that expensive perfume belong to Mary? I'm assuming that it was her property – so I'm guessing that by all rights she could do with it what she wished. That's a bit hard for us to accept sometimes. Imagine if our young adult child went to the bank and drew out their summer wages of nearly \$10,000 and handed the cash to a beggar walking by on the street. I think all of us would gasp and perhaps even lost it somewhat more dramatically. But that is what the worth of the perfume was – somewhere between 6,000 to 10,000 dollars.

For that amount of money many of us would be tempted to give advice about its use. Judas certainly was – he had really strong opinions and they cost him his life and the life of his Lord. And I'm betting that more than I can identify or empathize with him on this one.

So maybe we can feel some of Judas' pain. But then – that Judas is a temperamental sort of person. Who knows what he's thinking? You'd always have to be guessing if you meet with his approval. Obviously Mary's behavior really sets him off – because he leaves and we learn that he then betrays Jesus to the people who were looking for a way to destroy this dangerous radical.

Seems that Judas wants things to go just the way he wants them to go. I guess that many of us think that way but do we go out and betray our friends? Who wants someone like that in our midst?

And then there's Jesus who accepts people like Mary and Judas and loves them and welcomes them and lets them be. It challenges me a bit to wonder if He was right in treating them and us that way. Here the parenting side says that maybe – just maybe Jesus should or could have been a bit more directive in behavioral guidelines. Wasn't He supposed to be training or teaching these followers in how to change the world? Part of me thinks Jesus should have stopped their zealous, impulsive actions. He could have – couldn't He? What kind of example was He letting them set for the rest of us? But here they are – presented to us through the stories we hear. How can we relate to folks like them?

I'm asking you to think about Mary and Judas and Jesus as real people in our world today and to think about whether you'd want your child to be part of their group. Or to think about whether you would be willing to be part of their group? Judas – Judas cared so much about freedom for his people – for the Israelites. He wanted them to live free from the oppression of outside rulers. He wanted to help bring in a better world for the Jews. And Mary was absolutely enthralled by Jesus and she was willing to give her total loyalty and time and money to Him. These are radical people – zealous, dedicated. Around here we don't much live that way. We aspire to be balanced, rational, respectable.

But Jesus wanted Mary and Judas as part of His church – as part of His group of disciples. He came to them and picked them and taught them- even honoring their choices and telling others to let them be. We hear Jesus saying “leave her alone” when the reality is that Mary's actions hurt no one, including herself, and her extravagance provided her with great pleasure. Understanding and accepting that might still cause us some discomfort – but then we need only look to Judas who couldn't let go of the desire to control situations to his satisfaction and we can see the destruction he caused. And what is scary to me, and perhaps some of you, is that I can identify more closely with the actions of Judas than of Mary. I want life to unfold that way I want life to unfold.

Which leaves me challenged – it really leaves me challenged. I can dismiss Judas and Mary as stories from another time and place or I can ponder on them as fellow human beings that were actual disciples of Jesus. And I can ponder about what Jesus saw in them. And I can ponder about how radical, zealous and unorthodox I'm willing to be. Can I honestly consider myself a disciple? Could I have fit in? Or would I have felt comfortable having my children follow this guy, endangering their lives and living outside of the acceptable norms?

It's stories like these today about Judas and Mary that bring home to me just how different someone like Jesus is and was. This way of life He teaches – it's about not being comfortable, about not pleasing everyone. It's about coming close to a fire, a consuming fire that burns away our respectability and changes our focus and our priorities. It's a challenge. I tell you – it's a challenge.

What kind of follower am I? How much am I willing to be changed? How about you?