

March 20, 2021

Lectionary Passages:

Psalm 51:1-12

Habakkuk 3:2-13

John 12:1-11



Selected Verses:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit. – Psalm 51: 10-12

You came forth to save your people,  
to save your anointed.  
You crushed the head of the wicked house,  
laying it bare from foundation to roof. – Habakkuk 3: 13

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. – John 12: 3

Devotional:

As close as we come to anointing in the Presbyterian Church is the laying on of hands at ordination. When someone is ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, elder or deacon, others that have been ordained are invited to lay hands upon them for the prayer of ordination. This prayer is setting apart for unique service.

In the Old Testament, priest and the High Priest was anointed with holy oil to sanctify, to set apart for a holy purpose. In the Temple, objects were also anointed with oil since they were being set apart for a holy purpose. It was forbidden for anyone outside the priesthood to use oil for anointing.

So, when Mary anointed Jesus' feet, she was breaking all customs. As soon as she anointed Jesus' feet, Judas Iscariot criticized her. He talks about the cost of the oil. It could have been sold and the money given to the poor. It was worth about a year's wages. Yet, if we think about what something is worth instead of using our gifts as God intended, we could never accomplish God's purposes.

Mary was probably supposed to be helping Martha with serving the meal. Instead, she took the oil and anointed Jesus' feet. Maybe she was thanking Jesus for restoring her brother Lazarus. It was showing her complete devotion to Jesus. Though she did not know it, she was anointing Jesus for his burial and at the same time for his role as High Priest.

Jesus knew that his death was imminent. Luke tells us it was six days before the Passover. At Passover, Jesus' death would give a new meaning to the Passover. Now, instead of needing to sacrifice a lamb, Jesus would be the sacrificed Lamb of God. Because of tradition, there would be no time to anoint the body after death, so Mary was anointing the body before burial.

As a result of her faithfulness, Mary's gift will be remembered to all people. Her act is one of the few events told in all four gospels. Unknowingly, she was anointing Jesus in his role of High Priest. Remember, the role of the High Priest was to enter the Holy of Holies and offer a sacrifice on the day of Atonement. Now, on the day of Passover, Jesus was offering himself, without sin and unblemished, as the sacrifice in the Holy of Holies. The fact that the temple curtain tore from top to bottom displays that God accepted the sacrifice and bestowed His grace and His presence for all people.

As a result of Jesus' sacrifice, we can now be washed clean. We can now be restored into the joy of our salvation. We can come before God, saved and anointed for God's holy purpose. With Jesus as the High Priest, all who follow him are part of the priesthood of all believers. As a result of Jesus, we too are set apart for a holy purpose. We are called to be a holy people.

Prayer:

God of Mercy, grant us a heart that yearns deeply for your presence, and approaches your throne with the confidence of children; that with singleness of heart we may join hands and voices, in glad celebration and grateful witness of all you have done. Restore us to fellowship with yourself and with one another through the reconciling work of your anointed One, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.