

**Text: Mark 14: 1-25**

**Theme: Series-The Servant King: Costly Love**

**Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 04/03/2018 at 10.30am**

Those who suggest that Christ's incarnation is as important as His crucifixion, who say that the theme of 'God with us' equals the theme of 'Christ died for us', cannot look to Mark for support. Mark does not even mention Jesus' birth, but for several chapters now, he has given us the grand build-up to Calvary. **Christ did not come into our world simply to be with us. If that is all He had done, however remarkable the incarnation is, we would be heading to judgement. He came to build a bridge between sinful humanity and a holy God, on His own dead body.** Nothing else about Christ's life matters quite as much as His death for sin, and glorious resurrection. Perhaps people want to take the focus elsewhere because sin and judgement aren't themes we like to talk about, but they form the heartbeat of biblical redemption.

Let us open our Bibles to Mark 14:1-25. From the onset, let me tell you where I think the story is going. I think the point of this story is this: it is a beautiful thing when the *worth* of Jesus and the *love* of his followers, match — when the *value of his perfections* and the *intensity of our affections* correspond. And it is not beautiful, but suicidal, when they don't. So, we consider the chapter under three sections all having to do with love:

- 1. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE (from Mary),**
- 2. UNREQUITED LOVE (from Judas and the disciples), and**
- 3. SACRIFICIAL LOVE (from Jesus)**

### **1. EXTRAVAGANT LOVE**

The first verses of Mark 14 open with a reminder that Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away. The *time* is significant, because at every Passover there was a great expectation of the expected Messiah to liberate the people from Roman rule in the style of the first Passover at Egypt. — Passover reminded the people of the time when God raised up a great deliverer, Moses, and freed Israel from foreign oppression. It was the night the angel of death passed over Egypt and killed every firstborn except those who were redeemed by the blood of a lamb that was slain and applied to the doorposts of their dwellings. Hence, it was a time of great patriotic and messianic anticipation. The Romans were on guard and ready for any hint of revolt.

Moving on in the chapter, we have the story of the extravagant love displayed by this woman for our Lord Jesus Christ sandwiched between a murderous plot by the religious leaders to kill him (verses 1 and 2) and a great betrayal by one of Jesus' close friends (Judas) to betray him (verses 10 and 11).

As the **chief priests and the scribes who had at various times benefitted from the healing and benevolence of Jesus** plotted the murder of an innocent man, it showed that they did not fear God. Nevertheless, they feared the people. These religious leaders were not afraid to murder the Son of God; they just believed they had to do it in a politically smart way. They were prepared to do anything in order to hold on to power and prominence.

**Let us contrast their action and motive with what the woman did as she anointed Jesus with perfume.**

Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a well-known person. There were plenty of Simons, and so they had to put another name to distinguish him. There can be no question by whom he was healed; for there was nobody else that could heal leprosy, except

our Divine Lord. As He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of pure nard. Then she broke the flask and poured *it* on His head. John's account of a similar incident (John 12:1-8) tells us that this was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha.

This was a wonderful, perceptive act of Mary. Jesus just rode into Jerusalem as a King – and shouldn't kings be anointed? Mary understood this, but the disciples didn't. Mary did something that was both captivating and lovely "with a certain bloom of charm upon it." (W. Barclay). When Mary was finished, she didn't look to the disciples and ask their opinion of what she did. You should rise above such idle dependence upon man's opinion and approbation. What should matter is what your Lord thinks.

Mary stepped out in faith. Her act of extravagant love was shameless, selfless, and risked both embarrassment and the sneers and jeers of harsh criticism. But love compelled her. According to Barclay, **"If love is true, there must always be a certain extravagance in it. It does not nicely calculate the less or more. It is not concerned to see how little it can decently give. If it gave all it had, the gift would still be too little. There is a recklessness in love which refuses to count the cost."**

#### **(Verses 4-9) The reaction to what the woman did.**

This story of Mary of Bethany's extravagant act of anointing Jesus for burial holds many profound lessons for every genuine Christian today. The narrative contains the only sermon that Judas ever preached. Listen to his three-word protest. *"Why this waste?"* This particular alabaster flask seems to have been worth more than a year's wages for a labourer. It is like spending £20,000 to purchase Versace perfume, and pouring everything on Jesus! "We should feel obliged to Judas for figuring up the price of that box of costly nard, but he did it to blame the woman.

Judas exploded with criticism, saying, "Why are you being so wasteful? You could have helped the poor with this small fortune!" This was a mean-spirited complaint. Mary's token of exquisite devotion exposed her own heart and the heart of Judas, as well as the other disciples who agreed with him. Judas sought to cloak the real motive behind his complaint with pious rhetoric. It was a case of cold-heartedness judging warm-heartedness under the guise of being spiritual.

The contrast between Mary and Judas is dramatic. In Mary, we see the light of love. In Judas, we see the darkness of sin. Mary anointed Jesus for burial; Judas prepared Him for betrayal. Unfortunately, Judas is not alone in engaging in this behaviour as it is the practice of some of us even today. We easily criticize those who show more love to Jesus than we do. We sometimes want to define a fanatic as someone who is more devoted to Jesus than we are. Mary probably started to wonder if she did something wrong. While she was misunderstood and denigrated, she never justified, defended, or explained herself. She just simply, as it were, looked unto Jesus.

And Jesus gave her the highest compliment and defence. (Verse 6-8) "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her?" ...She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Once again, we see the confidence of Jesus as the Cross loomed close ahead. Confidence in the sense that He knew that death on the cross would not be the end of his mission. By saying "Wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her", He believed that the good news would go around the world and that his mission as Saviour was unstoppable.

It seems that the disciples did not want to think about the death of Jesus. When Peter heard of it, he tried to talk Jesus out of it. Mary had a different devotion, and instead of debating or denying His death, she turned it into an occasion of deep devotion. Mary listened and believed

the teaching of Jesus in a way that the other disciples simply didn't. When He said that He would be delivered into the hands of wicked men and mocked, scourged and crucified, she believed it. She must have reasoned, "If my precious Jesus will be mocked and tortured, then let me give Him some special honour before he dies.

## 2. UNREQUITED LOVE

**(Verses 10-11)** The beauty of her deed is set against the dark shadow of Judas agreeing with the religious leaders to betray Jesus. It is difficult to miss the importance of money in this emotive story. The woman is rebuked for recklessly spending on Christ, while Judas plots to betray the Son of God for money. How we use our money shows how much Jesus really means to us.

Jesus indirectly told Judas in his rebuke that the love of money, the desire to be rich, is suicidal. It blinds you to my worth. If you can't see that I am to be desired above all riches, you will die. Your preference for money is a preference for death. So, if any voice tells you to moderate your love for Jesus, do not listen. Let your affections for Jesus be lavish. If any voice tells you that his death is anything less than the triumph over death, do not listen. He is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him, though he dies, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in him shall never die.

We shudder at Judas' display of covetousness, jealousy, ambition, the dominant desire to have our way of things which are likely reasons which made Judas betray Jesus. But are we not guilty of same things as we betray the love of Jesus Christ in our lack of extravagant devotion to him? He loved us so much as to die for us, but we show lack of appreciation if we do not live for him and proclaim the gospel for which he died.

## 3. SACRIFICIAL LOVE

**(Mark 14:12-25)** Because of His sacrificial love, Jesus used the Passover meal, centred round the lamb that was slaughtered to free Israel from slavery (Exodus 12:1-13), to explain His upcoming death. His blood would establish a 'new covenant' wherein God would forgive and accept His people, not on the basis of their ability to keep His moral law, but on Christ's substitutionary atonement for sin. **The love and eventual death of Jesus was for the Pharisees who were plotting his death as well as the disciples who would do a runner when Jesus would face the kangaroo court of the religious leaders. That love is for you and me too. He died for us when we were undeserving.**

### Verses 12-16

So on the first day of the festival of Unleavened bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, 'Where do you want us to go and make preparation for you to eat the Passover? So he sent them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him....

This was an unusual sight. Women usually carried liquids in jars, and men normally carried liquids in animal skin containers. Therefore, **a man . . . carrying a jar** was a distinctive sign to the disciples. "The Lord must have had many unknown disciples, upon whom He could rely at such moments to render unquestioning service." (Cole). **And they prepared the Passover where Jesus declared that He had become the lamb of the new Covenant in His blood.**

### **(Verses 17-21) Jesus gives Judas a chance to repent.**

In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." And they were saddened, and one by one they said to him, 'Surely you don't mean me?'

The disciples heard many surprising things from Jesus, but certainly this was one of the most surprising things they ever heard. Not one of them suspected Judas, and the idea that one of

them would seek to **betray** and kill Jesus must have seemed absurd. **It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me:** In saying **who dips with Me**, Jesus did not single out Judas. All the disciples dipped with Him, so this phrase identified the betrayer as a *friend*. In Middle Eastern culture, betraying a friend after eating a meal with him *was* and *is* regarded as the worst kind of treachery

**Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man!** Even though his actions fulfilled prophecy (**the Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him**), his own wicked motive condemned him. Judas will never be able to justify himself before God on the Day of Judgment by claiming, "I was fulfilling prophecy." Jesus was offering Judas a last warning and warning him in advance of the consequences of his proposed action.

In the warning of Jesus, we see a profound love for Judas. This was his last, fleeting opportunity to turn back from his evil plot. A remarkable thing to remember is that Jesus loved both Mary and Judas. We almost want to think that He loved Mary and hated Judas, but that isn't the case. If we miss His love towards Judas – rejected love, to be sure – if we miss that love, we miss the whole story.