

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 42 O love of God, how strong and true

Reading: Mark 14. 1-11

Prayers:

This is the beginning of Mark's account of the death of Jesus.
Jesus is a marked man
and the chief priests and scribes seem anxious
to get rid of him before the Passover Festival,
perhaps fearing Jesus' influence on the crowds.
At the end of this story about Jesus at the house of Simon, the Leper,
we hear that another Simon, Iscariot,
provides those in authority with a way
of arresting Jesus without the crowds being aware
of what was happening.....

It is in this atmosphere of foreboding
that Jesus eats in the home of man who many Jews
might have regarded as an outcast.
Even a man suffering from leprosy who was healed
was seen as someone who was to be avoided
and treated as an outcast.
We can almost feel the tension
which led to an explosion of anger that night.

- The woman shouldn't have entered this male sanctum
and her action creates the same horror Victorian gentry would have felt
if a woman had entered into their club and kissed one of the guests!
- She breaks the bottle of very expensive Indian ointment
and pours its contents over Jesus' head.

How did Mark and those who first heard his Gospel
understand what was happening?
Mark feels that it's a moment of great significance
for he has Jesus saying that what she has done
will be remembered "wherever the good news is proclaimed."

First, they may have noticed that Jesus commends two women for their devotion to God.

The first woman was in the Temple
who even in her poverty gave her all in thankfulness to God.
Here, by contrast, a woman of some wealth
offers that which must have been precious to her
in thankfulness to God.

It is significant that though Jesus' disciples were all male
their lack of understanding is contrasted

with the insight and generosity of these women.
Simon, the host, and this woman
are generous to Jesus in what they give to him that night
and he, in turn, gladly receives their gifts
and makes them welcome.
The disciples are furious
but once again, the gospel turns the world upside down!

Secondly, the woman prepares Jesus for death and burial.

Certainly this is what Mark tells us Jesus said.
It is perhaps part of the fury of the disciples
that they can not accept that Jesus is coming to the end of his life.
It's like the anger we sometimes feel
when a person tells us they haven't long to live.
We don't want them to talk in that way.
We want them to go on and on
and not to talk in this way!

After his death, of course, there was not time for Jesus to be anointed
as the Sabbath would begin at sundown.
By the Sunday morning, when the women arrived at the tomb
it was again, too, late!
The woman does for Jesus that act of kindness
no one else would be able to do for him!

Thirdly, Jesus is anointed as Messiah

Did Mark and his readers see the action of this woman
as the anointing of Jesus as King, as the Messiah?
Certainly many have felt that by her action
this woman was expressing her belief
that, in Jesus, God has come close to her as King and Priest.
What an extraordinary moment!
A woman, without realising the full meaning of her action,
anoints Jesus as God's Messiah, King of the Universe!

As we come to our communion, we give thanks

- for Jesus who accepts all who come to him:
Simon, the Leper; the woman with her oil; you and me
- for Jesus' willingness to give himself even unto death
- for Jesus as the Messiah, the one who reveals the grace of God
in all its height and depth.

In our communion we may ask
that we may know his acceptance of us
and, in our lives, reveal his grace. Amen.