

Bruton Parish Episcopal Church
The Fifth Sunday of Lent
The Rev'd Jan Brown, Deacon
April 7, 2019

Our gospel passage this morning teaches us a lot about ways to honor and to dishonor Jesus. We've got examples of honoring Jesus in our homes, honoring Jesus with our hearts, and honoring Jesus when the opportunity presents itself. And, we've got an example of dishonoring Jesus with theft, lies and deception.

Beginning in verse one with Jesus coming to Bethany to the home of Lazarus whom he had just raised from the dead. Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha gave a dinner for him. Jesus felt welcome in their home. It was a place where He and his friends could rest. It was a place where he and his friends had stopped before, a place where he was the guest of honor.

(pause)

As followers of Christ, we are to always strive to have homes where Jesus is the unseen guest. Where how we live in private is the kind of life that could be seen in public without guilt, shame or embarrassment.

Homes where we would not have to hide things in closets or drawers so that they wouldn't be visible to Jesus.

Homes where we would not be embarrassed by what we are watching on television, listening to on the radio, or reading in books and magazines

Homes where we would we not be ashamed of how we talk with our spouses or our children, or our pets.

When our homes are full of negativity, resentment, fear and hatred, we are not able to welcome Jesus in our homes.

Jesus was welcomed as the guest of honor in the home of Lazarus. Jesus should be welcomed as the guest of honor in our homes as well.

Take a moment and ask yourself, how welcome is Jesus in my home?

(pause)

Verses two and three mention Martha, Lazarus and Mary, each with their own passions, gifts and manners in which they honor Jesus with their hearts. Martha is the first one mentioned, she honors Jesus from her heart by serving, using her gift of hospitality, and she demonstrated her love and devotion for Jesus.

Next we have Lazarus. Lazarus is among those reclining at the table with Jesus. Lazarus appears to be enjoying being in the presence of Jesus who had just brought him back to life. He wanted to fellowship, talk, ask questions, and listen to what Jesus had to say. He wanted to enjoy every minute he had with Jesus. I know I would.

Finally Mary appears. Instead of serving Jesus food, or enjoying fellowship and conversation with Jesus, Mary is moved to show her devotion for Jesus in a very different, much more dramatic way. The scripture says, she "took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them-with her hair".

Mary gave her best to Jesus. The perfume was very expensive, she had been keeping it for the day He would be buried. She poured it out with complete abandon, it was perhaps the most expensive possession she had. That's how much she loved Jesus, that's how she honored Jesus with her heart.

Some of us claim to love Jesus, however, we are not willing to give Jesus our best.

Not only did Mary give her best to Jesus, she was also willing to humble herself in order to honor Him.

To pour a costly bottle of perfume on someone else's feet is one thing, but to wipe it with your hair is another. A woman in this time, letting her hair down in front of a man who was not her husband was considered wrong. Yet, here was Mary, without respect for what others thought, anointing and honoring Jesus, in humility.

In verses four through six we see Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would betray Jesus, dishonor Jesus through his deception. He questions Mary's gesture of love for Jesus knowing all the while that he himself is a thief and a liar. He accuses Mary of wasting the perfume, perfume that could have been sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor, even though there was no evidence he had cared about the poor before.

In verses 7 through 8 Jesus corrects Judas by telling him that the poor would always be with them, but that He would not. In other words, Jesus was telling him and us that we should honor Him whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Mary did not wait until Jesus' burial to anoint Jesus; she did it when the opportunity presented itself. She was clearly ready and eager to do so. While the others were serving food or enjoying being in his presence, Mary was passionate about honoring and loving Jesus. She was spontaneous, authentic and natural; there was nothing formal or planned or scheduled. She simply honored Jesus when the opportunity was at hand.

There are different ways that we honor Jesus. There are different ways in which we follow Him, there are different ways that we welcome Him into our homes and lives, and there are different ways that we show Him how much we love Him. What is most important is that we, like Martha, Mary, Lazarus and the other disciples before us, discern which way is best for us, and choose to act when the opportunity is at hand.

Some of us will choose to serve, both Jesus and those whom he came to serve – the poor who we always have with us. Others will spend time being in His presence. Some of us will open our homes, extending hospitality by offering a meal or conversation. Some of us will be more dramatic, lavishing our full devotion and care while others will be more reserved, choosing to pray, or meditate or fast.

How are we welcoming Jesus, making space in our homes and our hearts so far this Lent? It's not too late. Are we scheduling time or are we taking the opportunities when they arise to do so? Or might we be doing both?

Is there room in between our phone calls, internet searches, Netflix binges, or heavily scheduled days? Is there room in between our thoughts about how to meet our own needs? Is there room for extravagant devotion for the one who gave his whole life for us?

This week, spend some time in prayer. If you're moving too fast, pray for help to slow down. If your house is not in order, pray for time to set it straight. If your heart is full of hostility, resentment or hatred towards others, pray you repent and return to God.

As we journey through the final days of Lent, and look upon Jesus' last days in Jerusalem and his ultimate gift on the cross, how will we honor Jesus in our hearts, in our homes, and in our lives? Opportunities will present themselves, and we get to choose whether we will respond from fear or

scarcity or whether we will respond freely and extravagantly to God's love and forgiveness of us.

May we do so when the opportunity presents itself, not out of fear or scarcity, rather freely, in response to God's love and forgiveness of us.