

*Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3Mary 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. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5“Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.*

I think she was in love.

You have seen it a hundred times in movies or on TV. A thousand times.

Some of you have felt it – lived it.

Being in love.

The whole world is suddenly spring and flowers – fragrant - blooming.

There is sunshine in your heart even on the grayest winter day.

You want to be close, touching, being touched.

You see him or her and your spirit leaps.

You are like a young lamb bouncing with new life.

To be in love is the most wonderful feeling in the world.

I think she was in love.

Mary - sister who sat at Jesus' feet while Martha slaved to get a meal ready. Do you remember the story, how Martha complained to Jesus, and Jesus told her Mary had made the right choice – being with him, listening to him?

Mary, sister of Lazarus whom Jesus had recently raised out of death. Four days he had been in the grave before Jesus called his name and he came walking out of the tomb.

Mary of Bethany.

I think she was in love with Jesus.

How else to explain her actions? Taking a whole pound of costly perfume made of pure nard – oil from a plant that grows in northern India – so expensive that what she poured out was worth a whole year’s wages for a working man – she took the perfume and anointed Jesus’ feet with it. And then she wiped it with her hair - her love – all the affection she felt for this man Jesus.

Think of it – he had defended her against her domineering older sister. He had turned her tears of grief and sorrow into tears of joy by raising her brother.

She loved Jesus.

Jesus said the perfume was purchased for the day of his burial but she was pouring it out now. Did she think of marriage to this eligible bachelor Jesus? A home with him? Children? It is hard to imagine that she did not.

I wonder, did Jesus love her?

When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews with her also weeping that he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. It was in that encounter that we read the words, “Jesus wept.” Not when Martha came to him – not when he stood outside Lazarus’ tomb, but when he saw Mary’s tears and the tears of those with her. Is this a hint of the love Jesus had for her?

You say, “Of course Jesus loved her. Jesus loves everyone.”

But this gospel, the one we call John speaks a number of times of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Did he also love Mary? As a man loves a woman did he have feeling for Mary?

Then how difficult at this moment to speak of his burial.

Judas had objected to what Mary was doing – objected to the waste of this perfume – the waste of the money it represented. But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

What if Jesus loved her? What if he could have imagined a marriage – life with her – children – growing old together? And still chose to die on the cross. What if?

Did he make the right choice?

Mary must not have thought so. She was not among the Marys at the foot of the cross – Mary, his mother, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene.

If she was in love with Jesus and he in love with her, his choice robbed her of her dreams – her life.

The cross of Jesus was costly – as costly as if you were to lose everything and everyone in your life right now. The cross of Jesus was costly to him – but also to Mary of Bethany and the disciples and the other Marys.

The cross of Jesus was the end.

All the old dreams they had for Jesus were crushed in that cross.

But a new dream was born.

Paul writes of the things he treasured: his ethnic heritage, his religious heritage, all the honor that should have come to him for his faithful living. He says that for Jesus he regarded all of that as trash, rubbish. Only being like Jesus, only being with Jesus mattered.

What matters to you and to me? O, so many things. We want them all.

God gives you Jesus, the one who gave up all things for you.

Paul says to be like him is the greatest treasure - like him in his suffering that we might join him in his living – his resurrection.

God gives you Jesus, promises you the life Jesus now lives.

Be like Mary, treasure him above everything.