

Mark 14:3-9; 15:37-47

Lenten Service

April 4, 1990

Sixteen lents and easters have come and gone, and I have never preached a sermon on her. I have spoken of Peter and James and John, asleep in the garden while Jesus agonizes in prayer, but never have I spoken of her. I have told what ~~Jesus~~^{Judas} did betraying Jesus with a kiss, but I have never told what she did. I have remembered the names of Caiaphas, and Herod, and Pilate, soldiers and guards who mocked and spat and struck. I have remembered the name of Barabbas before God's gathered people, and the two robbers who ridiculed and taunted Jesus. I have remembered those who gambled for Jesus clothing, even a young man who ran away without his clothing, rather than share in Jesus fate. But I have never stopped to remember her.

Tonight that is going to change.

Isn't it curious that we have the names of all these men, Peter and Pilate, Barabbas and Judas, all who by their words and deeds stood against Jesus. Everything the gospel story is told, we repeat the names of these men who failed, but she, the only faithful one has been given no name in this gospel. Even though Jesus said of her, "Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

At the beginning of Jesus' passion, while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table a woman came with an alabaster flask of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. But there were some ~~there~~ who said to themselves indignantly, "Why ~~this~~ was the ointment thus wasted? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor." And they reproached her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have ~~me~~ me. She has done a beautiful thing to me. What she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world what she has done will be told in memory of her."

She loved Jesus. She expressed her love for Jesus by taking ointment worth as much as a man would make in a whole year, and pouring it on Jesus. For this she was criticized, reproached by Jesus own followers. But Jesus said it was a beautiful thing.

How many times I have told the story of Jesus, saying no one was faithful, but she was. Nameless, so often forgotten, in Jesus eyes she stands above Peter and James and John. Everone else who loved Jesus said no to his cross to his death. But she anointed his body for burying.

Don't you wonder how she could slip by so many times? How we could tell the story over and over yet most often forget the one who was faithful? I wonder. Some say that it has mostly been hes that have been telling the story, and that she was a she. I wonder.

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In preparing for this sermon this evening, I did some research on the temple. when Jesus died, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. I thought that might have something to do with women, and their standing before God.

What I discovered was that the temple had a courtyard outside of it, called the Court of the Gentiles. Inside the temple, furthest away from the holiest part of the temple was the ~~court~~ women's court. Beyond a wall and a gate was the court of Israel, the men's court. ^{Surrounding} ~~the~~ the altar was the court of the priests, like our chancel here. Behind the altar was the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies.

Think especially of those three courts, Gentile, women, men, I read the account of Jesus death and burial: And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breath- ed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him, saw that ~~the~~ he thus breathed his last, he said, Truly this man was the son of God.

The curtain in the temple was torn, and God makes his temple in the heart of a Gentile, the first one in this gospel to confess that Jesus is God's Son.

The very next words we read are these: There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, the younger, and of Joses, and Salome, who when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered to him, and also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem.

While the men failed in every way, sleeping, ~~and~~ betraying, denying, abandoning, the women followed all the way to the cross. Could Mark be suggesting that they too would become part of God's new temple?

And we read: When evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arithmathæa, a respected member of the council who was also himself looing for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion he asked him ifx whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. And he brought a linen shroud, and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.

Pinna~~ly~~ one who could enter the sancutary, the court of Israel, shows his love for Jesus by burying his body. Joseph was a member of the sandhedrin, one of the very people who had condemned Jesus to death.

Gentils, women, Jewish men, each is a sign of what is to be. We Lutherans speak of the priesthood of all believers, all who believe in Christ are privileged to stand directly before the almighty. We believe that when that curtain was torn God went out to make his dwelling in the hearts of everyone who believes and is baptized.

As I typed this serwon, I thought of an elders meeting not so many years

ago. We had quite a discussion about beginning to use women elders to distribute the sacrament. We wondered how many might be upset.

I thought of the first time I received communion from a woman pastor, how different it seemed.

As I typed this sermon I thought how what began in Jesus crucifixion with the tearing of the curtain of the temple, must still be struggled for nearly two thousand years later, even within his church. In the early days of the church, the struggle was between Gentile and Jew and God led his his servant to proclaim: For Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, what he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile ^{both} ~~to~~ to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.

Today, many are struggling to say that women are full members of the body of Christ, that in Christ there is neither male Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.