

In John 11, we read the story of Lazarus who died to the dismay of his sisters, Mary and Martha
However, Jesus finally arrived and raised Lazarus from the dead
Because of this many followed Jesus, but the Pharisees were increasingly troubled by Jesus
The Chief Priests and Pharisees began to openly plot Jesus' death

John 12 opens with a follow up to the story of Lazarus and a meal of gratitude
John 12:1-8

We first encounter Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 when Jesus visits their home
Martha is the doer—she prepares the meals and creates a hospitable welcome to Jesus
Mary is the one who simply sits at Jesus' feet and listens to his teaching
They have a little spat as Martha is frustrated that Mary left her to do all the work
But Jesus sides with Mary and says that she *"has chosen the better part"*

Here we find them giving a dinner in Jesus honor as they express gratitude for their brother's life
The familiar patters hold true here as well
Martha is the doer—she serves the meal and does the work
While Mary does the frivolous thing of anointing Jesus' feet

Clearly one serves through her actions, while the other simply wants to be with Jesus
The arguments that must have risen over the years can only be imagined

But this time, Mary doesn't just sit at Jesus' feet—this time she does something way more dramatic
...even outrageous!

All of the attention is on Mary as she takes a pound of expensive perfume
Mary anoints Jesus's feet and wipes his feet with her hair
To do that Mary had to take her hair down and that wasn't culturally appropriate here
The culture said that her hair should be covered in public
There is no mention from Mary's point of view as to why Mary did this
But the meaning was clear—it is an ultimate pledge of loyalty to Jesus
Since guests reclined at a meal, she could easily reach his feet on the couch behind him
It was a brazen act that left considerable tension in the air along with the perfume smell

I'm guessing that Martha was embarrassed for her sister and angry that she would do this

But it isn't Martha that is recorded as objecting to what Mary did
Nor is anything said about the inappropriate way in which Mary used her hair
The concern is all about the money!

In Matthew and Mark, we learn that the disciples all share the concern stated by Judas
But John records Judas as the one that speaks up,
"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" John 12:5 NRSV

Writing this years later, John comments after the fact, that Judas would betray Jesus
In so doing, John alludes to his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver and love of money
To the point that he frequently took money belonging to them all
John clearly finds Judas as the one to blame in his erroneous assessment
But likely at the time, it was a common feeling that Mary was being wasteful
300 denarii was a lot of money—up to a year's wages for a laborer

Jesus responds in a surprising manner when he says,

"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." John 12:7-8 NRSV

Jesus isn't worried about the money

Jesus suggests that Mary purchased the perfume so that she could anoint his body after he died

I think Mary is saying more with her actions than she knows with her head

It is a prophetic act of devotion—one that is unplanned and just happens

It is a compulsive act of devotion and undying love to Jesus

Yet, it is true—Jesus will die soon—he will be killed on a cross and buried quickly

The timing will be such that there won't be time to do the traditional burial

Without knowing it consciously, her actions are prophetic

Sometimes the same is true for us—the message given to us is prophetic and beyond our knowing

Without understanding what is really happening or the importance—we speak or do...

Following the Leadings as they come—living into trust and being faithful to the next piece

But what about Jesus statement about the poor? — *"You always have the poor with you"*

The statement has been used to justify the presence of poverty and that we must accept it

But Jesus refers to an Old Testament passage about Jubilee with this statement

If you obey me and do Jubilee—there will be no poor among you

But if you harden your hearts and are greedy—there will always be poverty

The chapter is about meeting the needs of others—including foreigners

Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

Deuteronomy 15:11 NRSV

Jesus talks a lot about money and the destructiveness of *greed* and worship of mammon

"You always have the poor with you" is simply naming the reality of their society

Not an excuse to justify acceptance of poverty while perpetuating systems of poverty

Finally, Jesus once again tells them that he will not be with them much longer

"...you do not always have me."

Within a couple of weeks, Jesus will be crucified—but they still do not understand

Back to the present moment at the meal at the house in Bethany

Martha is in the kitchen

Jesus, his disciples, and Lazarus are eating together

Mary anoints Jesus' feet with perfume and dries them with his hair

Judas objects

Jesus says to leave her alone

Mary's actions erupt as both a prophetic act and a shameless act of undying love and devotion to Jesus

Are we willing to follow our Leadings?

Sometimes it will look outlandish and risky

Sometimes it will look like being too cautious and careful

That's why discernment is so important

It is a wild abandonment to trust and following our Leadings in any given moment

A willingness to take the risks and be present to that which rises within us

Trusting the Leadings that come