

Beauty and Betrayal

Thomas Robinson, *Palm Sunday*, March 20, 2016

Matthew 26:1-16 (Cf. Mk 14:1-11; Lk 22:1-6; Jn 12:1-8)

¹ When **Jesus** had finished **all these sayings**, he said to his **disciples**, ² “You know that after two days the **Passover** is coming, and **the Son of Man** will be **handed over** to be **crucified**.”

³ Then the **chief priests** and the **elders** of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was **Caiaphas**, ⁴ and plotted together in order to **arrest Jesus** by **stealth** and **kill** him. ⁵ But they said, “**Not during the feast**, lest there be an **uproar** among the **people**.”

⁶ Now when Jesus was at **Bethany** in the house of **Simon the leper**, ⁷ **a woman** came up to him with an alabaster flask of precious **fragrant oil** (*myron*), and she **poured it on his head** as he reclined **at table**.

⁸ And when the **disciples** saw it, they were **indignant**, saying, “**Why this waste?** ⁹ For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to **the poor**.”

¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done **a beautiful thing** to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this **oil on my body**, she has done it to **prepare me for burial**. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever **this gospel** is proclaimed in the **whole world**, what she has done will also be told **in memory of her**.”

¹⁴ Then **one of the twelve**, whose name was **Judas Iscariot**, went to the **chief priests** ¹⁵ and said, “What will you give me if **I hand him over to you?**” And they paid him **thirty pieces of silver**. ¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to **hand him over**.”

Daniel 7:13-14 *Daniel's vision of Son of Man receiving God's Kingdom for the people*

¹³ I was watching in a vision of the night, and ... one like a son of Man was coming ... ¹⁴ And to him was given authority and all the Gentiles of the earth.... And his authority ... shall certainly not be taken away, and his kingdom ... shall certainly not be destroyed.

Matthew 21:4-5, 8-9 *Jesus enters Jerusalem as the humble King*

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey...’” (Zech 9:9) ...

⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road (2Kg 9:13), and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna (Save, we pray) to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Psa 118:25-26; Mt 23:39). *Hosanna in the highest!*”

Psalms 133:2 *Reflection on the anointing of Aaron as high priest*

² It is like the precious oil (*myron*) on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron...

1 Samuel 10:1 *Samuel anoints Saul as king of Israel* (cf. 2Kings 9:3)

¹ Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, “Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel?”

Matthew 25:35-36

³⁵ “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, ... ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”

What Do You See as Events Unfold?

Matthew is leading us to see who Jesus is. He helps us watch as different people interact with Jesus, positively and negatively, and we can respond to what they see in Jesus. His concern is with us readers. He recounts memories of the early disciples, oft repeated. He counts on our growing sense of expectation, our sense of how difficult this was for many of them.

Two days earlier (Sunday) Jesus entered Jerusalem with a crowd acclaiming him King (21:1-11) as he enacted prophecies of the humble king (Zech 9:9; Ps 118:25-26). Since then, conflict with all the leaders in the temple. Questions of Messiah, Temple, kingdom of the Son of Man – all loaded with expectation and struggle at the time of Passover. All challenging for us.

Now Jesus begins (v 2): Passover (deliverance from oppression, creating a people in covenant with God); Son of Man (receiving kingdom, unending authority). What flows from these? *“Handed over to be crucified”!* What!? The opposite of expectations! What can it mean?

We watch the chief priests, Caiaphas (high priest appointed by Romans): Seize the dangerous Jesus; kill him. Not during Passover! Let a sense of disappointment and failed hopes set in. Two scenarios with a surprising overlap. But ‘crucified’ means Romans, and at Passover.

A Woman’s Beautiful Deed

The scene changes: Bethany banquet with a man who symbolizes Jesus’ ministry of giving life.

We watch as an unnamed woman enters and pours precious fragrant oil on Jesus’ head.

Jesus does not stop her or question her. He simply receives the act. What does it mean?

We can easily see that Jesus is being anointed as king, a humble king anointed by a woman.

We watch the disciples respond, probably thinking to please Jesus. He had just instructed them about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked. It’s too late to recover the oil but not too late to condemn the woman’s action as waste and express their concern for the poor.

To their surprise, Jesus does not approve their judgment. This is why Jesus said not to judge. The woman’s act will never hinder them from serving people in need. But their moralism blinds them to the grace of the kingdom unfolding in front of them. It embodies God’s self-giving love to give meaning to all their acts of loving service. This is a unique moment of surprise.

Then Jesus expresses the meaning of the woman’s beautiful deed. We are surprised! We knew it would be anointing as Messiah-King. And it is, but in a way we had not expected. It is preparing *“my body for burial”* – after crucifixion. No mention of resurrection. The darkness must be faced. The disciples must see it. Only through the horror/grace of death will the kingdom of the Messiah/Son of Man break forth (Ps 22; Isa 52-53). Jesus surprises everyone.

Jesus adds weight to the moment. Crucifixion, burial sound like defeat, the end. But they’re God’s unconquerable love that will be proclaimed to the world. A beautiful deed retold forever!

A Disciple’s Betrayal

But at least one of the disciples has had enough. All this talk of crucifixion and burial is not the hope, Exodus, kingdom victory that Judas had signed on for. Jesus talked about feeding the hungry but then accepted a woman’s extravagance anticipating burial! It made no sense! If it’s a kingdom, Judas is ready! If Jesus is planning defeat and death, it’s time to get out.

Judas probably feels like he’s been had. What can he get out of this fiasco now? He goes to the people with resources to pay: 30 pieces of silver. The “five talents” Jesus used as a symbol of the gift of God’s kingdom is a thousand times that. But this is real money. Hope is dead.

Judas will hand Jesus over at Passover. The Romans will crucify him. He’ll be buried! What will become of Kingdom hopes? Cross and Kingdom together?! How? What do you see in Jesus?