

Holy Mystery, open our eyes, our ears and our hearts that through these words, we might see you, hear you and thus live according to your Word. Amen

She appears in all four gospels, this woman with the alabaster jar. Sometimes she is nameless, sometimes she is identified as a sinner, and sometimes she is specifically named as Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Sometimes she anoints Jesus' head and sometimes, after washing them with her tears and wiping them with her hair, she anoints Jesus' feet.

Except in John's gospel, where the writer simply refers to the story, but doesn't actually tell it, she and her actions, pertain directly to the message of each particular gospel theme. In one, God's grace and forgiveness; in another, as a juxtaposition to those plotting Jesus capture and demise, ... including Judas Iscariot.

Here, in Mark's gospel, as we've seen in the past, at first glance it seems to be about extravagant spending versus tending to the poor. The disciples are appalled that this woman would waste her money to simply anoint someone's head. You have to admit, a year's salary seems a pretty unreasonable amount to spend on a bottle of perfumed lotion.

The average annual income for a Canadian is \$50,000. Imagine spending \$50,000 on a bottle of perfume, and then pouring it out over someone's head!!

It's easy to see why the disciples freaked out! Think about how many people that might have fed and clothed. How many medical issues might have been dealt with, prescriptions filled!

Aren't we supposed to be caring for the poor? Wasn't that part of last week's lesson...Love God, love neighbour – including the widow, the sick and the poor?!

But this time, Jesus disagrees. This time, Jesus says, “you have your whole lives ... and generations to come, to care for the poor. But I will only be with you for a little while longer.”

It's not the first time Jesus has alluded to or fairly blatantly tried to explain that he is journeying to his death. Three times, in Mark's short gospel, Jesus is pretty clear that “the Son of Man will be captured, condemned to death and killed.” But the disciples still don't understand.

This woman, however, this unnamed woman with the alabaster jar sees what the disciples cannot see. She hears what the disciples cannot hear. She knows what the disciples do not know. ...And she acts accordingly.

Without consideration of cost, either financial or social, she brings her perfumed lotion to Jesus, breaks open the jar and pours the lotion on his head.

Notice that she doesn't dip her finger into the jar and dab a bit of it on his forehead. She doesn't even pour a small amount into her hand and rub it onto his head, rather, “she breaks open the jar and pours the ointment on his head.” All \$50,000 worth!

It is not an act of foolishness. It is not even an act of extravagance. It is an act of love; an act of deep understanding; an act of recognition; an act of faithfulness.

She saw, she heard, and she knew that this man, these teachings, this vision of hope, is of God. And so she gives all she has, perhaps more than she even realizes she has, to honour and respect his life and his death.

I invite you, for a few moments, to close your eyes and listen to the silence...watch in the darkness...

What is God showing you? ...

What are you hearing God say? ...

What call is God putting on your heart? ...

Is it beyond your understanding? ...

Is it beyond your expectations? ...

Is it beyond your capabilities? ...

Will it cost you too much time? ... too much money? Too much of your life?

Might people consider you a fool if you act on it? ...

Might people ridicule you, rebuke you, look on you with disdain? ...

Or perhaps it feels like you haven't seen or heard from God in a while.

Perhaps you are feeling rather nameless, or unworthy.

Whatever the case, don't be discouraged, even the disciples, when the time is right, see and hear and understand and act accordingly.

... open eyes

At one time or another we are all like the disciples, wanting with all our hearts to "get it", but not able to see clearly, hear precisely or understand completely.

And at one time or another, we are all the woman with the alabaster jar, seeing what others can't, hearing what others don't, understanding beyond our own comprehension.

Sometimes we consider the cost and sometimes we pour ourselves out completely, giving all that we have and more.

Where ever you find your faith situated today, this week, this month, this year, may you keep the faith, hold fast to what you do know, to what has been revealed to you.

And no matter the cost, no matter what others might say, may you break open the alabaster jar that is your life; acting faithfully and living fully into all that lies before you as we journey with God in Christ Jesus. Amen. May it be so.

