

Have you ever thought about how many stories in John's Gospel has Jesus sitting down with friends around table? It begins with the wedding feast in Cana and continues with all the other stories of gathering together to break bread and tell the story with friends and followers.

Two dinners take place right before the time of Jesus' suffering and death; a dinner at Bethany at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus and the dinner in Jerusalem in the upper room with his closest friends. Then in the final scene of the story, after it has all come to pass, Jesus appears again for a breakfast of bread and fish with Peter and the disciples.

Today we find ourselves in a home in the little village of Bethany about a mile and a half outside of Jerusalem, where Jesus stopped in to see his friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus before he entered the city for the last time. Jesus loved this family. They must have known each other for a long time and formed a special bond. They called Him Lord, so they knew who he was, but they weren't his disciples, at least not in any formal sense. They were his friends, the three people in whose presence he could be a man as well as the Messiah

All throughout John we see feasting with Jesus as intimate gatherings. Today we find ourselves in Bethany where Jesus can find good company, comfort, peace and be Himself.

Martha is said to serve. She is busy cooking in the kitchen. Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to His every word. Then, mysteriously, she disappears into her room.

The guests gathered round the table and began to eat and to talk about the events that had led up to the day. I can imagine that Jesus and Lazarus had a lot to talk about; or maybe they just sat close to one another, savoring the experience.

No one had noticed that Mary had gone until she came back. She held in her hands a jar of expensive nard. As she opened the jar this wonderful aroma filled the air. It was so different than the last time they were together and the stone was rolled away from Lazarus' tomb. The stench was unbearable, the stench of death. Now the room was filled with sweet perfume, maybe the sweet smell of everlasting life. Then she loosens her hair, which is very inappropriate for a woman to do in the company of men. And then she takes the perfume and puts it on Jesus' feet, which is also inappropriate. She doesn't seem to care. She somehow knows that this is the last time that she will see Jesus and He must be anointed. Then she wipes the excess oil off with her hair; an act of pure humility and faithfulness. Mary had sat at Jesus' feet, listening to his

teachings for several years. She knew and understood in a way that most people didn't, that Jesus is Lord and that His story had to be fulfilled.

When we think of this meal and the meal that we call 'the Last Supper' we can see the similarities. Both are suppers; both involve the actions of washing and wiping, which are interpreted as acts of service, self-sacrifice, and love; both are intimate gatherings with those whom Jesus loves. Jesus' forthcoming death is a thought in everyone's mind at both celebrations. And we find Judas, the villain, present.

Here we have all the details of the supper, the serving, the wiping, Judas, all acting as a parallel to the Last Supper. Mary is acting as prophet and priest. She is following the command that he will give to the apostles as he washes their feet.

So where does this story need to take us in the fifth week of Lent as we head to Palm Sunday? How does this story help us to continue on the road to Calvary and to becoming an Easter people?

Throughout Jesus life on earth he treated all people equally. In today's story Mary is acting in a manner that is totally unaccepted by the society of the time, but he tells the others to leave her alone. Women and all people were and are accepted by Jesus just as they are. Her actions were those of devotion, humility and service to God and others.

In the course of His life, Jesus showed us the ways to be of service, to show compassion, to be a people of love; love of God and love of others. He continues to gather his friends and loved ones, us, for a meal, a simple supper of bread and wine, but still a feast, to feed us with his body and blood, to nourish us to go on living in His example of standing up for the oppressed, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sick and the dying.

In the Old Testament reading this morning the passage from Isaiah says the restoration of all things comes through God's salvation of His people which we know is given through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And throughout that life 'all things have been made new'. Through us following in the example of Jesus all things are being made new.

In Isaiah we hear:

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.

I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

Sermon Lent 5 C
She knew Jesus
April 7, 2019

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert...

To give drink to my chosen people,
the people whom I formed for myself

So that they might declare my praise.

And we might add ... and continue my work on earth.

Amen.