

Holy Monday, 2009

John 12:1-11

The Reverend Faith Bledsoe

I remember that visit well. Jesus always stopped for a visit and meal when he was nearby. The last time was...well the last time was when he called me from my grave. My sisters had sent word to him and of course he came. We had loved one another like brothers since we were children, although I never really understood his affinity for a kid like me – small, skinny, prone to injury and illness. He defended me more than once from the village bullies.

On this particular visit, the air was tight and thick with Martha's worrying. You see, there was a contract out for Jesus' arrest, which actually meant a contract out on his life. And if they found out that he was here, they would probably arrest us too. Caiaphas and his men were up to no good and we all knew it.

We hadn't even finished the meal when Mary came in with that bottle. I had seen it before. She had brought it home from the market just a few days after I had rejoined this life. She brought it to my bed where I was resting, hoping its beauty and fragrance would cheer me I suppose. She said it was a gift for Jesus.

I was surprised by that. This was expensive stuff, the kind one might use at the burial of someone rich and important. And while I didn't begrudge the gift, I wondered what Jesus would think of such an expenditure. And I wondered what Mary knew that the rest of us didn't. Had she foreseen his death in one of her meditative visions? Mary knew the scriptures as well as any man. Jesus had taught her when we were children. As he learned, she learned. Perhaps she saw things there unknown to the rest of us. At any rate, I was not willing to criticize her. Both she and Martha had cared for me all of my life when really I should have been the one caring for them. I loved them dearly. If Mary wanted to gift a friend that I loved as well, then so be it. I only hoped this did not mean the death of our friend. I knew there was no fear of death in him, only sadness in my own heart at the thought.

It was Judas who voiced concern about the expense. He kept the money for the group traveling with Jesus – a kind of treasurer if you will. He was always questioning how money was spent and complaining about the cost of things. So it was no surprise to hear his voice in this matter. And he made a good point – the money could have been used to feed the poor – old Daniel, now blind and reduced to begging; or Ruth, whose husband recently died and now has no protection for herself or her daughters; or any one of the hundreds of homeless beggars in the streets.

The surprise was Jesus' response – you always have the poor with you, you will not always have me. She has kept this toward the day of my burial. I wondered if this was another of his riddles he was so fond of using. After all, Mary had already opened the perfume and poured it on his feet. I wondered if in washing the road off his feet after his arrival, she thought of the perfume. Was this simply an adjunct to her hospitality or did the two of them know something? Did they assume the contract would be fulfilled and therefore had a mutual understanding that she was anointing him for pending death? Yet anointing for burial happens after the death, not before.

Later that night lying in bed, I wondered if there was something in Jesus that had already died. Had he given himself so fully to God that all the other aspects had died? Had he, like our ancestor Jacob, wrestled with God and given over some part of himself? Had he opened himself so completely to the divine that he was no longer of this life? And yet he was

here, eating and sleeping in my house. Well, it was late and I couldn't make any more sense of it than that. I would simply have to live with these questions as Jesus had taught me; live with them in patient and humble prayer, not expecting any particular answer, but with the assurance that God knows my heart and is present there even amidst such questions.