Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Do you enjoy doing puzzles? I expect that all of us have at least done one puzzle at some stage in life. But have you ever done a puzzle only to find that there is one piece missing? Urggghh! We had a puzzle like that at home once and it was such a big puzzle, with such a beautiful picture, that we just couldn’t tear it up and put in the box and throw it away. So I had to cut out a puzzle piece that was the right shape and paint the missing part of the picture so we could enjoy the finished puzzle. Well, imagine if you opened up a puzzle and all that was inside was the very outside pieces and none of the middle part? You would have no idea what you were looking at.

Well, that is kind of the situation we have at the moment in the Gospel of John. The message of John’s Gospel is that to receive eternal life you have to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And the death and resurrection of Jesus are the **crucial parts** of Who He is and What He came to do. But we are now three years into the public ministry of Jesus and though He has done a lot, He still has to die and rise again. At the moment then, those who knew Jesus kind of had the edge pieces of the Jesus Christ puzzle but not the middle part!

* So at the end of ch. 6, we heard Peter say about Jesus, “*You are the Holy One of God*.”
* And in the last chapter, we heard Martha say about Jesus, “*You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world*.”
* And while those are wonderful confessions of faith, and even though they have now witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus, they still have not understood what the resurrection of Lazarus reveals about Jesus; they still have no idea that to be the Christ He must die and rise again.
* And we will see that this is the case in that when Jesus dies they think that all is lost.

But one person, it would seem, has at least begun to understand that Jesus must die and be buried. And we will see that today in this act of Mary. And as we consider what Mary does and what we read about Lazarus, we will see something about the enormous cost of following Jesus that we too must be prepared to pay. And of course, there is also something to be learned from the words of the Lord Jesus, as well as from Judas Iscariot, by way of a negative example.

These events took place, as we read in v1, “*six days before the Passover*.” It is on Passover night that Jesus will be arrested. So the last week of Jesus’ life begins with the events described here. That is why our sermon theme today is **The First Day of the Last week Reveals the Cost of Following Jesus**. And we will simply consider the four main characters in this passage – Mary, Judas, Jesus, and Lazarus.

1. So we begin with Mary.
   1. We know from the other Gospel accounts of this episode that the dinner was held in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper. And we can safely that assume Jesus had healed him of leprosy! So that’s amazing! But we are also told that Lazarus was there, “*whom Jesus had raised from the dead*.” That’s also amazing! And we also know from the end of ch. 11 that everyone in Jerusalem had orders to report sightings of Jesus so that the Jewish leaders could arrest Him. And Bethany was just 1½ km’s from Jerusalem. So humanly speaking, it was very brave of Jesus to be there. So that too is amazing! But none of those things are what makes this meal so memorable; what makes it memorable is what Mary does. For we read that she “*took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair*.” And we learn in v5 that the perfume was worth at least 300 denarii, with a denarius being one day’s wage. So in today’s money, that’s around $50,000. Mega wow!
      1. But it is not just the *value* of the perfume that makes this gift so incredible. What also makes it incredible is ***why* Mary did this**. Obviously, she loved Jesus. And obviously, she was very thankful that He had just raised her brother from death! But Jesus explains her main motivation in v7. Now, for various translation reasons that I won’t bore you with, v7 is hard to translate into English smoothly. That’s why you see a little note in your Bible saying that there is another way to read v7. But the parallel accounts of this episode make it very plain that Mary was anointing Jesus for burial; she knew that He would give up His life for her. We know from Mark’s Gospel that Jesus said this in plain words to His disciples, three times, but they simply did not understand what He was saying. But Mary understood and believed!
         1. Now, we know that this was revealed to her by the Holy Spirit. And we know this because that is the only way a person can learn spiritual truthes (1 Cor. 2). But think back to probably **the most famous Bible account of Mary**. Do you remember that story boys and girls? It is found in **Luke 10**. There we read about the time when Jesus visited Martha and Mary’s house and while Martha was very busy and distracted with getting the meal ready, Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to His teaching. So Mary understood what Jesus was going to do *because she listened to Him*.
         2. It’s not actually all that complicated, is it! **How do we learn about Jesus? By listening to Him**. And even though we cannot physically sit at His feet today and listen to Him talk to us, we have the word of the Lord Jesus in the Bible. This is where we listen to the teaching of Jesus. And I know that some people have very good memories and they really like reading, and all that, but show me a person who knows a lot about Jesus and about Bible stories and about doctrine, and I will show you a person who reads their Bible. If you want to know more *about* the Lord Jesus, or if you want to *know the Lord Jesus more*, read the Bible.
         3. Perhaps you have heard about **the man from Kansas City who was severely injured in an explosion**. His face was badly disfigured, and he lost his eyesight as well as both hands. He was just a new Christian, and one of his greatest disappointments was that he could no longer read the Bible. But he heard about a lady in England who read Braille with her lips. So hoping to do the same, he sent for some books of the Bible in Braille. Much to his dismay, however, he discovered that the nerve endings in his lips had been destroyed by the explosion. But one day, as he brought one of the Braille pages to his lips, his tongue happened to touch a few of the raised dots and he could feel them. Like a flash he thought, I can read the Bible using my tongue. And at the time that the person who knew him wrote about this, the blind man had “read” through the entire Bible four times. And he didn’t do this just to tick boxes; he understood that his knowledge of God and salvation in Jesus and godly living and his relationship with his Saviour would only grow by reading the Bible.
         4. And this seems like a good time for me to promote our area Bible studies that begin again this week! Please attend so that together we can listen to the teaching of Jesus!
2. Well, we learn more about Mary as we come to vv4-6 and what we read about **Judas**.
   1. As the smell of this perfume filled the house, Judas piped up and asked why this perfume was not instead sold and its proceeds used to help the poor? Now, we learn from John that Judas didn’t actually care a fig for the poor; he was simply a thief. But was Judas making a fair point? Was Mary wasting money?
      1. Well, we know from the reaction of the Lord Jesus that He did not think so. He approved of what she did. In fact, in the other two Gospel accounts of this moment, Jesus said, “*Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her*.” Jesus knew that this was a stunning offering of love and thankfulness and worship. It was thankfulness for what Jesus *had* done and for what He *was going to do* that led her to give this most valuable possession to her Saviour. And there are a couple of points worth considering that flow out of her act:
         1. The first is that **to be a follower of Jesus is to be a person who gives generously and sacrificially**. We are commanded in the Bible to tithe our income, which means to set aside one tenth of what we earn, and give it to the Lord in the offerings. It is an OT command but it is nowhere undone in the NT. In fact, if anything, the NT enlarges our reasons for giving. We have Mary’s example here. **2 Cor. 9:7** says that “*the Lord loves a cheerful giver*.” And the Greek word translated as ‘cheerful’ is *hilaros*, which is literally hilarious in English – “*the Lord loves a hilarious giver*.” When everyone else would be shocked at the gift that the follower of Jesus is presenting to the Lord, such is their love and thankfulness for God’s mercy in Christ to them, the follower of Jesus is inwardly rolling on the floor laughing his or her head off! Does that sound like you? Are you a hilarious giver? Is your giving the sacrificial and generous response of thankfulness to God for His mercies toward you in Christ? Or is it whatever is in your pocket as you bowl up to church? Or the least you can get away with to keep your conscience quiet?
         2. But another lesson that flows out of Mary’s act and Judas’ response is **the danger of thinking that how you serve the Lord is how everyone else should serve the Lord**. It is right to give money for and help those who are poor. We read that principle in Deut. 15. But even if Judas had been sincere about the care of the poor, not everyone had to be about that work in the *same* way and to the same *degree* as he was. And this is a very specific problem that the Bible speaks to in a couple of places with the image of the congregation as a body made up of different parts – **1 Cor 12 and Romans 12**. In both places we are told that the Lord gifts people differently and that we have to be very careful about requiring other people to do the things we do. So one person might serve for many years in some voluntary position while another can make large donations while another is always handing out gospel tracts while another does the dishes at every church meeting. So yes, we must all serve the Lord and His people, and we can grow in our abilities and learn new ways to serve, but we don’t all have to serve the Lord the same way.
         3. So, followers of Jesus should be hilarious givers and we must allow each other freedom in how we serve the Lord and His people. These are a couple of lessons that flow out of this event.
3. But thirdly, there are also some very beautiful lessons here from the response of **Jesus** to Mary’s act that we see in vv7-8. And notice three things in particular:
   1. First, the Lord Jesus **shielded** Mary. When the words of Judas rang out, there was likely a moment when everyone, including Mary, looked at Jesus to see how He would come down on the matter. And make no mistake, those times were not friendly times for women. But Jesus tenderly shielded Mary. He said, “*Leave her alone*.” And so, my friend, whenever you are threatened or overwhelmed or attacked, flee to Christ. Find your shelter in Him as you hear Him say, Leave him/her alone.

* 1. But notice secondly that Jesus **approved** of what Mary had done. Over the past couple of weeks you have heard me speak about the doctrine of total depravity, which is to be spiritually dead and incapable of any saving good. But the follower of Jesus is one who has a new nature. They are no longer totally depraved. The Spirit of Christ lives in them. And so, God is truly pleased with your loving and thankful obedience and service. As believers, we are actually commanded in **1 John 3:22** to “do what pleases [God].” And the clear implication of these words is that we can please Him. So boys and girls, when you obey your parents for God’s sake, God is delighted! Young people, when you choose not to answer back to parents/teachers/boss or to close down your instagram account because you know you are spending too much time on it, for God’s sake, God is thrilled! And Brothers and Sisters, when you resolve to start a new Bible reading plan or join a Bible study or volunteer for friendship class or BOM, for God’s sake, or when you husbands and wives resolve to be more Christ-like towards your spouse, God is elated!
  2. But thirdly, note also that Jesus **knew Mary’s heart**. Mary had *silently* anointed Jesus but He knew why she had done this. And this is a reminder that God reads your innermost thoughts and motives – the good ones and the bad ones. So brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, your sacrificial service of the Lord and His people will not always be noticed by others and sometimes it may even be misunderstood or criticized by others. But your God knows your motives. He knows your heart. And one day, in the throne room of heaven, He will vindicate you before everyone!

1. Well, that leaves just one person for us to consider and that is **Lazarus**. And we read about Lazarus in vv9-11.
   1. Now, Lazarus doesn’t actually do anything here but the very fact that he is alive after having been resurrected makes him a target of the Jewish authorities. And so in v10, we see that “*they made plans to put Lazarus to death as well*.”
      1. And if you look back at 11:50, you will remember that the High Priest said there that it was better for **one man**, meaning Jesus, to die rather than the whole nation. Now though, as they make plans to kill Lazarus, it seems that it will actually be better for two men to die – Jesus *and* Lazarus. And if you know the Book of Acts and church history, you will know that the number of casualties for Christ, or martyrs, those who die because they are followers of Jesus, is beyond numbering now and it grows every day.
      2. We are considering the cost of following Jesus. And Jesus Himself was very clear about the cost of following Him: A little later on in **ch. 15** He says to the disciples, “*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you … If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*.” If you follow Jesus, you will be persecuted and maybe even killed.
      3. The world today demands **tolerance**. You must tolerate other people’s identities and their sexual preferences and orientations and their opinions. But the world will not tolerate the Lord Jesus Christ and those who follow Him. If a person understands the message of who Jesus is and what He came to do and what He demands of His followers, they will either love Him or hate Him; there can be no middle ground. And if they hate Jesus, they will hate you. I don’t claim some special prophetic insight, but I fully expect to see Christians like you and me arrested, *here in NZ*, *in my lifetime*, because of what we believe about issues like gender and sexuality, which ultimately are about being a follower of Jesus.

Well congregation, the world’s reaction to Jesus and His followers, what Mary did to Jesus that day, and how Jesus responded to what she did are important parts of the Jesus puzzle. The picture is becoming clearer. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God and we may have life in His name if we believe that. But life in His name demands that we be willing to pay the price for following the One who paid the price to set us free. Are you ready and willing to pay that price? Amen.