



**A Sermon preached in Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Michigan  
by The Reverend Maureen Martin, *Associate Priest***

**Palm Sunday  
24 March, 2024**

*In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Nothing, I think, I mean that quite literally, compares with Holy Week to ground the Christian. Faithful attendance each day at some sort of gathering, however simple, however poorly attended will make it work. Each day with its appointed readings is a dose of unfiltered gospel. A quote from Fleming Rutledge, a great theologian of our time.

So, we began today with Jesus sending disciples ahead to find the cult for his entrance into Jerusalem. And then in the passion he sends them again to secure room for the Passover feast. These events emphasize for us Jesus' dependence on human companionship and his lack of material goods in his last days on Earth. Jesus has nothing else. He came into this world at his birth with nothing, and will leave it not having accumulated anything except for this: friendship and having done that which he came to accomplish the doing of his father's will. How different that is from our lives today in this world. How upside down from our experience, our drive to amass stuff and our own struggles with self-centered willfulness.

As we are in all of scripture, we are invited into this week to do as Fleming says, to gather and listen, reflect and inhabit the gospel. This is a tried and true ancient way of getting involved with scripture, to imagine ourselves as one of the characters in the story. There are plenty to choose from as this story has crowds, team Hosanna, and team crucify and disciples, stander-bys, so many to choose from. So perhaps you could imagine yourself as a member of the crowd who spontaneously threw their cloaks down onto the ground as they cheered Jesus on his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. And then maybe in your imagination, think about the dust of the street and a few fragments of dried palm clinging to it as you go about your week, perhaps returning to take your place in that second crowd who come to watch the crucifixion. Meanwhile, as you stand there, you notice the fragments of palm branches still clinging to you. Perhaps you are feeling bold and you want to go with a named character. Peter, who loves Jesus, but is frightened and denies him. Peter, the rock on whom Jesus builds his church. Emphasizing for us, that for Jesus, he has to put his faith in us, just regular people. And so he does.

Then and now and for all times, Jesus is dependent on us to tell the story, carry out his ministry and build the body of Christ. Would you deny Jesus? We cannot deny that we do so from time to time each one of us, and yet we remain beloved of God. In our abandonment, God does not abandon us. Now, if we were to turn the readings back just one page, just one day, we would find the story of the unnamed woman with the alabaster jar that comes with that costly ointment. I bring her up because I see her as a second pole to Peter in the story.



If we were to inventory their actions, we would see that where Peter denies Jesus; friendship, she recognizes his divine nature. Where Peter is afraid to risk, she is not. Where Peter and the disciples get caught up in the economy of this world questioning her judgment as she wastes a year's worth of wages to anoint Jesus, she gets caught up in the gracious economy of God and pours herself into the posture of dedicated, committed discipleship. Imagine that where Peter is alone with his doubts, she is accompanied through the week by traces of oil on her sleeves, the occasional hint of its perfume wafting past her nose as she remembers her act of worship and gratitude.

Though she might still be on the fringes of the crucified crowd, the connection that she has experienced in that moment of anointing will not be lost to her. As Jesus stands there alone and abandoned, maybe he too can still catch a hint of that beautiful oil, the fragrance of nard in his hair or on his beard.

This woman sleeps within us waiting to be awakened for us to make room for her. She might be the most intimidating of all the characters in the story to imagine inhabiting so powerful as to not need a name, and yet she is our truest self. Now, one of the blessings of Holy Week that I haven't mentioned yet is that corporate America hasn't figured out how to monetize it, yet. Easter will never be anything like Christmas, thanks be to God. Peeps and Cadbury eggs sell themselves for the most part, you need no advertising. You eat them anyway. And there are only so many ways to color an egg. And as far as the Easter Bunny goes, the one in the mall is a straight up nightmare.

The gift for us is that we don't have a lot else to do this week outside our normal commitments, which compete for our time. We don't have gifts to buy or a nonstop series of parties to attend. At most, you are planning a dinner or a brunch, which ought to leave you with the gift of time to come sit with Jesus, have a bowl of soup with friends, and immerse yourself in this fragrant mystery.

Nothing does compare with Holy Week, Fleming is right. Like nard, it soaks into us, softens and soothes us. It leaves its scent on us, marks us as beloved of God with fragments of song, memories of dimly lit processions, monstrous, thunderous music, bare wood and crosses, we are formed. Where we fall short, Holy Week bridges the gap and holds on to us. Holy week. Simply put, it works. Amen.