

Tuesday, January 31, 2017 - Day 30 – Exodus 25-27, Psalm 25, Matt 26

There is so much going on in chapter 26 of Matthew's Gospel: The Last Supper, Jesus' agony in Gethsemane, his betrayal by Judas, his arrest and being handed over to the high priest Caiaphas and Peter's threefold denial. Upon reflection, it was none of these events that captured my attention. What struck me was the event at the beginning of the chapter - the woman who poured an entire jar of expensive oil over Jesus' head. This event seems so insignificant in comparison to all the other ones in the unfolding story of the Paschal mystery. And yet what's amazing is that this extravagant act is included in all four Gospel accounts. Maybe it was such a strange thing to witness that folks kept talking about it. Maybe as many commentaries suggest it foreshadowed Jesus' death and so all the Gospel writers wanted to include the moment as the crucifixion drew near. For whatever reason, it was notable enough to be included in all four accounts.

I think it's notable because it is that one, rare moment where someone seems to get what is happening to Jesus. Not concerned about herself or the ramifications of her extravagant actions, the woman offers Jesus her outpouring of compassion and love. I think the unnamed woman was wanting to say to Jesus, "I see that you're lonely and afraid. I wish I could stop all this from happening. I'm not wasting all this precious oil as others may believe. It's my way of showing you how precious and beloved you are to me and that my heart is breaking, too." No one else in this chapter paid attention to Jesus like the woman with the alabaster jar. No one else could stop for just one moment and be with him in his suffering.

As I pondered this encounter I thought of my own mother. Yesterday she celebrated her seventieth birthday. Forty-five of those years she's been a mother. And twenty-four of those years she's been a deacon. My mother and I both say that our calls to ministry came out of the same place but led us in very different directions. I spent much of my childhood as a hospital patient with my mother always by my side never letting me forget my belovedness in her eyes and God's eyes. From that experience the Holy Spirit stirred in each of us a call to share God's healing grace and love to a broken world. My call led me out of the hospital and into the church. My mother's call kept her in the hospital to serve as a chaplain.

In her motherhood and in her diaconate, my mother has always been there, paying attention to the needs of those in her midst. Like the woman with the alabaster jar she has poured out her care and compassion so freely and generously upon her children, her parishioners, and her patients, journeying with us all into those places of great pain as well as those places of great joy. Today I honor the witness of these two women for their fierce and unquestionable love. I pray that I may live my life and serve my people with that same love, sharing the extravagance of God's compassion with those I'm honored to share my journey.

By The Very Rev. Emily Richards